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THE COUNTRY GENTLEMAN.

BY

"SCRUTATOR,"

AUTHOR OF

"RECOLLECTIONS OF A FOX-HUNTER,"

"THE MASTER OF THE HOUNDS,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE COUNTRY GENTLEMAN.

CHAPTER I.

THAT evening the two girls sat rather later than usual in Lady Agnes' dressing-room, discussing the wonders and beauties of Dropmore, as well as the courteous conduct of its owner.

"Really Edith," remarked Lady Agnes, "Mr. Chetwynd is exceedingly good looking and entertaining, beyond any person I know; and his house fit for the reception of a princess. Would not you like, dear Edith, to be the mistress of such a place?"

"No Agnes, indeed I should not; those fierce-looking creatures would haunt me

every night in my dreams, and you will laugh at me for saying I felt quite relieved when the carriage was announced to take us home."

"My dear Edith, what childish ideas! —one would suppose you were still in the nursery. I am quite in love with the house and all its luxurious comforts, and nearly so with the owner of it; for although not so young as Sir Digby, he is quite as handsome, equally agreeable, and far more clever and entertaining."

"Well, Agnes, in all these points, I agree with you, he is his superior; but there is a wild, stern expression sometimes in his dark eyes which makes one quail beneath their gaze, and induces one to think he is not good-tempered."

"Only one of your fancies, dear Edith, for I read that expression differently, as exhibiting firmness of character and resolution. I like a man of spirit and courage; but I really believe, Edith, you think no one equal to Edmund."

"We have both cause to think highly of

him, dear Agnes; and now I must wish you good night."

The Earl, who had been taken by surprise in allowing his daughter to sit for her portrait to Mr. Chetwynd, was deliberating at first how he might extricate himself from the difficulty in which he found himself so unexpectedly placed, without rudeness to Chetwynd, of whom he entertained a very high opinion, although he could not bear the idea of his daughter's forming an attachment for him; but on due reflection, he thought it best of two evils to choose the least. Chetwynd was a man of well-known good fortune, and his appearance betokened regular and steady habits of life. His agent, who was also the Earl's man of business, spoke of him, whilst absent, as not spending more than half of his income, which exceeded ten thousand a year; and this was evidence of his being a prudent as well as a wealthy man, which the Irish baronet was not. His being a neighbour also was another recommendation; so that the Earl, from dread of his

daughter forming an attachment for Sir Digby Colville, deemed it more prudent to comply with her wishes, and consented to her taking some more sittings in Chetwynd's studio, with Edith and Mrs. Errington, or himself, as her companions.

Edmund entertained no doubt as to Chetwynd's real intentions, from the conversation he overheard at the Ball, and his particular attentions to Edith afterwards at the Marquis's dinner party. He had heard him express his decided resolution never to marry any woman for rank or money, having more than a sufficiency of the latter; and from his long sojourn in America he had imbibed rather too independent ideas as to the aristocracy of his own country, although closely allied to that class. Edmund therefore met Chetwynd with cordiality the next evening when he dined at Woodborough, and, from his observation of his conduct towards the two young ladies, felt confirmed in his previous opinion that Edith was the object of his choice, and that he was making

Lady Agnes the stepping-stone to his further advancement in her friend's favour.

The next day, therefore, Edmund volunteered to accompany the ladies to Dropmore, to inspect the conservatory and other curiosities; and if persuaded before, he became now thoroughly satisfied, by Chetwynd's peculiar manner towards Edith, that he had no cause for jealousy. Lady Agnes also remarked it, and on seeing him occupied in pointing out to her the beauties of some rare exotics, she could not forbear saying to Edmund in a pettish tone—

"Mr. Chetwynd seems to forget he has any other visitor than Edith. I have seen and heard enough of the contents of the conservatory, so let us walk out into the pleasure-grounds."

Edith being reluctantly detained in looking at a rare plant, and listening to its various properties, with her back to Lady Agnes and Edmund, who were, as she supposed, still occupied near her with other rarities, was not aware of their having left

the conservatory until, turning her head, she exclaimed—

"What has become of Lady Agnes?"

"She is not far off," replied Chetwynd; "stay a few minutes longer, Miss Maxwell, that I may show you a favourite flower of mine?" This was asked in a low and peculiar tone of voice.

"I must join my party," Edith replied, without noticing his question. "Agnes is not very fond of flowers, and will not be pleased, perhaps, at my remaining here so long."

"Perhaps she is more agreeably engaged," Chetwynd said, with a meaning smile; "and would rather dispense with the presence of a third person."

"I think we had better follow her," Edith continued, very gravely, advancing directly towards the lower door, through which her friend had disappeared.

Chetwynd, noticing her serious looks, saw at a glance this was neither the time nor place, nor Edith Maxwell the girl to listen to soft speeches from a person with whom she had become so recently acquainted, so

he merely said, in a more deferential tone, "Miss Maxwell's wishes are commands to me, which I shall ever feel the greatest pleasure in obeying;" and opening the door he immediately conducted her to Lady Agnes, who appeared out of temper with something or somebody—not this time with Edmund, whom she requested to order the carriage, much to the surprise of Mr. Chetwynd, who expected she would remain for a second sitting.

During their drive home she scarcely made a remark to Edith, and continued in a very uncommunicable mood during the remainder of the evening, until Edith went into her room to wish her good night, when she said—

"It seems, Agnes, that I have offended you to-day, but how, I am at a loss to understand."

"Oh, no, dear. I have not felt very well, and am sadly out of spirits;" but assuming a livelier tone, she said, with a forced laugh, "Well, I suppose, Edith, Mr. Chetwynd made a declaration of love

to you in the conservatory, where you were so long alone this morning; nothing less, I conclude, from the serious looks of both when you joined us?"

"Mr. Chetwynd could not, with common propriety, upon our short acquaintance have ventured on such a subject, and if he had, you have already heard my opinion of him."

"Oh," replied Lady Agnes, "girls' opinions change every day; Dropmore, with twelve thousand a-year, might reconcile the most particular young lady to a much more disagreeable person than Mr. Chetwynd."

"Twenty thousand a-year would not induce me to accept him or any other gentleman, unless really and truly attached to him—and you know my impressions are not in favour of the owner of Dropmore—so now, Agnes, good night."

"Well, dear Edith, I hope you are not too angry to refuse me a kiss?"

"I am not angry with you, dear Agnes, only annoyed by your expressing such an

unfair opinion of my feelings, which you well know are quite different from those you have just now accused me of."

On Edith retiring to her own room and reflecting on the occurrences of the day, she felt persuaded that the ill-humour of Lady Agnes proceeded entirely from Mr. Chetwynd's attentions to herself the short time they were in the conservatory together, and to avoid a repetition of any further unpleasantness of the kind Edith resolved to return home the next or following day, and accordingly wrote a short note to her mother, requesting her to send the carriage, or call for her, as soon as it was convenient.

When Mrs. Maxwell called for her daughter no one suspected, save Agnes, the cause of her leaving Woodborough, and when pressed to stay a few days longer, Edith excused herself by saying she had already exceeded the time of her intended visit by more than a week, and as her mother had a dinner party the next day, she wished her to be at home, which was

really the case; and it must be confessed that just at that time Lady Agnes was not very reluctant to part with her friend, of whom she began to feel rather jealous, from the admiration she had excited at and since the ball. Being a spoilt child, and of an impatient and selfish disposition, with an abundant share of vanity, she could not bear, without secret envy, the praises and attentions paid even to her dearest friend.

Some ten days had now elapsed since Edith's departure, when Chetwynd, having daily expected another visit from the young ladies, called again at Woodborough, where, much to his chagrin, he found Lady Agnes alone, and more formally inclined towards him than heretofore; but not appearing to notice her altered manner, Chetwynd expressed his hope that she would favour him with another sitting, that he might complete the picture to present to her father; and, after a few excuses about engagements, bad weather, &c., an assent was given, and a day fixed; and Chetwynd, having regained by a

few compliments her Ladyship's favour, soon after took his leave.

The secret spring of Chetwynd's behaviour was his desire of remaining on the best terms with Lady Agnes, with whom he had learnt Edith was frequently staying, and thus he might have further opportunities of meeting her, and gaining a clearer insight into her true character and disposition. For this purpose he thought greater facilities would be afforded him at Woodborough Park than in her father's house; for although on visiting terms with Colonel Maxwell, he was not so great a favourite with him as with the Earl.

After a few more sittings for her portrait, during which Chetwynd had reinstated himself in favour with Lady Agnes, the picture was completed, and pronounced by all who saw it to be a faithful likeness, as well as a highly-finished painting, quite equal to any of the best modern artists; and Chetwynd, having become on intimate terms with Edmund, paid frequent visits to Woodborough, in the hope of again meeting Edith

there; but finding she was not expected, he called on the Colonel, by whom he was invited to dine at Morton Grange, and thus his path lay open for more intimate acquaintance with the family. Lady Agnes meanwhile, from his frequent visits and polite attentions, had brought herself to believe that the owner of Dropmore had fallen a victim to her superior charms, although not seriously in love with him herself, — for hers was the love of conquest, not that of the heart.

CHAPTER II.

We must now take a retrospective view of Edmund Knightley's brief career as a gentleman huntsman. On his first appearance in public he found, like others entering on higher situations of responsibility, envyings and jealousies conspiring to render his assumption of office as disagreeable as possible. His brother Reginald, with Charley the first whip (who thought himself the most proper person to succeed Will Lane), were ranged against him on opposition horses, in the hope of marring his sport, and making him retire in disgust and discredit from the post he had presumed to fill. Edmund, however, was not the character to be deterred by difficulties and opposition from executing with energy his *almost* self-

imposed task; though, on his first appearance at the place of meeting with his father's hounds, Charley's sulky looks gave him warning of what he was to expect.

The covert to be drawn that morning abounded in foxes. The day proved boisterous, and Edmund saw he had to contend with conflicting elements within and without. A large field had congregated to witness the first throw off of the new huntsman, amongst whom old Squire White looked most conspicuous. The Captain also was there, having come out with rather malicious intentions towards Edmund.

The hounds had not been in covert ten minutes before a leash of foxes were on foot, upon which they rang the changes for some twenty minutes more, when, the pack dividing, Charley began playing the part of huntsman to one division, whilst Edmund was occupied with the other. Jack, the second whip, was in close attendance upon his young master, who, guessing Charley's trick, sent him to desire he would stop the other hounds, and send them to his horn.

Charley gave Jack for answer that he might stop them himself if he liked, for he couldn't get at them in the high wood; but this was only an excuse for himself to get outside the covert, and wait his chance of the fox breaking. This he did shortly after, and away went Charley directly with the greatest part of the field, hallooing and screaming to get the other hounds away also, to join the five couples with him, which it was his business to have stopped, and to have supported the huntsman with the body of the pack. Jack, seeing how matters stood, returned quickly to Edmund, reporting what had occurred.

"Then stick to me, Jack," was his reply, "and come along, for our fox is the right one, and will break the lower side now those coffee-housing fellows have left it."

In a few minutes more Edmund's prediction was realised, and a view-holloa from his father told him the fox had broken, and that the hounds were away over the best of their vale country. Edmund and Jack were quickly in their wake, with old Squire White and

some half-dozen farmers, who alone remained out of the large body of horsemen, the majority having gone in the contrary direction with Charley, Reginald, and five couples of hounds.

On passing his father, Edmund briefly told him Charley's trick, adding, "Never mind, my dear Dad, we have the best of the pack, and the fun to ourselves; so pluck up your spirit and ride hard for the brush."

"Go along, Edmund," roared out old Squire White; "I mean riding to-day, with none of those fire-eaters to knock one over."

In this order, then, they settled down to the work before them, Edmund leading with Jack and young farmer Springfield in close attendance; immediately behind them, Mr. Knightley, senior, old Squire White, and four other farmers of middle age, staunch supporters of the hunt, and men difficult to be shaken off, even when the pace was first rate.

Woodland foxes generally prove the stoutest runners, and this old sly-boots, having given the hounds the slip by some

two or three fields, held on his course in a straight line for the Morton Grange woodlands, some seven miles distant, passing through the pleasure-grounds of Woodborough Park, where Edmund was cheered on by the Earl and the ladies on the lawn. Fortunately for our young huntsman the fox ran the drive all the way through the Morton Grange woods, some two miles in extent, and again faced the open, turning away to the right, into the Marquis's country, for a well-known large gorse covert, which he seemed little inclined to leave. Here the hounds had been steadily working their game for nearly half an hour, a brace of fresh foxes having been disturbed before Mr. Knightley, with two farmers, came up, the pace having been too severe for old Squire White and his mare, when Edmund begged his father to enact the part of first whip on the other side of the gorse, young Springfield taking up another position to view him away. Jack was called to his assistance to get the hounds together the moment the fox broke.

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"Mind," cried Edmund to his father, "*our* fox is a large, very light-coloured one, with a long white tip to his brush."

"Don't you think, you young donkey," replied the old squire laughing, "I know a hunted fox from a fresh one?"

"It's more than I do, Daddy dear, sometimes; so don't make a mistake."

Mr. Knightley had been at his post some five minutes when he saw their game stealing stealthily through some patches of gorse outside the covert; and when clear of these he crept through the next fence, as if undecided whether to go or tarry. His movements were watched by the master, who sat perfectly motionless on his horse, behind a thorn tree, until the fox had crossed the next field, casting one longing, lingering look behind before he jumped the outside fence, as if doubtful of the policy he was pursuing in deserting the stronghold which had so often afforded him shelter. The parting scream uttered by the master on viewing him clear away seemed to bring conviction to his mind

(if he had any) that, a return being now very hazardous, he must depend on his speed and craft to reach some other place of refuge, of which he knew many.

Edmund and Jack experienced some difficulty in stopping the hounds from another scent to which they had now changed; but the farmers riding up to their assistance, their object was effected in a few minutes more, when, hearing their master's well known view-holloa, they dashed away directly, their heads well up, and soon settled down again on the line of their first fox. By this welcome check to their speed, horses, hounds, and fox had recovered their wind, and another dashing effort was made by the latter over five more miles of country for Dropmore woods, wherein was a strong head of earths.

"He saves his brush at Dropmore, Edmund," exclaimed the old master; "the earths are open."

"I'm not quite sure of that, my dear Dad, the Marquis was there yesterday, and

I'll bet a trifle those lazy earth-stoppers have not opened them yet."

Such was found to be the case, and after a ring round the covert, where the hounds got up to their fox, he was obliged again to fly, and turning away to the left, set his head for St. Austin's.

"Now, Jack," cried Edmund, "get forward as fast as you can for the main earths in Park Coppice—you may reach them before him; and you, Springfield, must help me as whipper-in, if wanted."

"Ay, Sir, most willingly; this is a glorious run, and I'll bet Mr. Reginald and Charley are sorry for what they've done by this time; now we go again, Sir, he can't reach Park Coppice at this pace."

"Well, I hope not, Springfield. I should like to finish handsomely."

Two more miles had now been passed at a rapid pace, when a small patch of gorse intervened.

"If he lingers a moment here," exclaimed Edmund to his only companion, Springfield, "we shall have him."

Just as the hounds were approaching the near end of the gorse, Springfield cried out, "Yonder he goes, Sir, by Jingo!"

"Quick then, Tom," was Edmund's reply; "put them on to me;" and cap in hand, their young huntsman hurried his ready followers round the gorse with a scream which seemed to set them crazy.

"Forward, my lads!" he cried, as the hounds caught sight of their game crossing the next large grass field.

Up went their heads, and the race for life and death recommenced more furiously than ever. For another mile, however, the gallant old fox held his place, the fences breaking the hounds' view;—but when emerging on an open common, they again caught sight of him, and with a scream from Edmund cheering them on, they spread over the heath, every hound straining for the lead, until they ran in and rolled him over, within a hundred yards of the wood hedge.

The whohoop of Tom Springfield echoed far and wide through the dells of St.

Austin's, and was borne back on the breeze to Dropmore, where old Squire White had just pulled up, sadly in want of a glass of sherry, which Chetwynd was giving him at the hall door, when Springfield's piercing whohoop caught his ear.

"They have him, by Jove, Sir!" he cried, throwing down the glass, and setting spurs to his old favourite; "I must be off."

Edmund, having thrown the fox to his eager and hungry subjects, remained on the spot until joined by his father and Jack, with two other farmers, when their small party, delighted with their day's sport, set out on their homeward track, on which they met old Squite White and his jaded mare, who could barely make out a trot.

"Glorious run, by Jove, Sir!" exclaimed the old sportsman, "the finest I ever saw in my life; twenty miles, if it was a yard! and done in an hour and forty minutes, including stoppages," as he pulled out his huge hunting watch, about the size of a small turnip. "Give me your hand, Teddy,"

riding up to Edmund, "I congratulate you with all my heart—nothing could be better done—first-class huntsman, Knightley, by Jupiter, as well as a first-class scholar; beats the Marquis hollow!"

"It is pretty well, for a young beginner," replied Mr. Knightley.

"Save for you, my dear Dad," added Edmund, "he would have beaten us; so the merit of catching him belongs to you."

"I just gave you a lift from the gorse, my boy; but your handling the hounds throughout could not be surpassed by Will himself,—if done so well."

"Here, Jack," cried old Squire White, diving into his deep waistcoat pocket, "here's a guinea for you, my lad, you're worth a dozen Charleys, and stick to your young huntsman as you ought to do. And as for you, Tom Springfield, you young dare-devil, I thought you'd have broken your neck over the Woodborough Park palings. Well, by Jove! Knightley, I vote we draft that wild harey-starey fellow Charley, and get Tom to play first fiddle,

as an amateur head whip. The d—— a fox would ever escape him and Teddy, with Jack to bring up the rear guard; and as for his holloa, Sir, I heard him at Dropmore four miles off."

"I am right glad to lend a hand at any time, Squire," replied the young farmer, "and wouldn't have had this fox beat us for fifty pounds of my own money, after the trick served us by t'other party."

They had been jogging leisurely homewards some five or six miles, when Tom Springfield's quick eye caught sight of a solitary red coat galloping across country, towards the road they were pursuing.

"Hah, hah!" cried Tom, "there's the Captain coming along over the fields yonder, and I'll warrant, by the pace he's going, Charley didn't give 'em much to do."

"Confound him!" said old White, "that's a fellow I detest—a dandified, jockey-like, horse-dealing chap—always riding in upon the hounds, when there's a bad scent, to sell his cattle; and that Irish baronet is just such another."

"He's mounted on a raw four-year old to-day," remarked Tom Springfield, "which he bought of my neighbour, Tomkins, a month agone for sixty pounds, and I warrant he sticks him into the young cotton lord for a hundred and twenty."

The object of animadversion—the Captain—now made for a gate close to the road, which he was endeavouring to open, when the hounds were just passing.

"Halloa!" he exclaimed on seeing Edmund, "why, where have you been running to, Knightley? I didn't expect to meet you in this quarter. What have you done?"

"Tolerably well," was Edmund's short reply, as he passed on, and the Captain's horse swerving from the gate at sight of the hounds, he had no time to ask further questions.

Soon after, however, they met Welford on the same road, who gave them an account of Charley's proceedings thus:—"We had a quick burst for a couple of miles, when the hounds threw up their heads on a piece of fullows. Charley made

a brilliant cast forward, without hitting off the scent; went to a halloa half a mile ahead; got upon a hare; ran her for a couple of fields; jumped up in view, Reginald and Charley rating and screaming; stopped the hounds; then a consultation what to do; Reginald was for drawing another covert; Charley said it was no use, with five couples of young hounds, and he must go back to the pack. Trotted on for several miles here and there to recover you, and at last gave up in disgust. Then said it was no use, and went home. That is the pith of the story."

"Just as I expected," muttered old Squire White, "a flash in the pan; and that's not all—unsettling the young hounds, which were just got steady—yet what do your steeple-chase fellows care whether they are after hare or fox, provided they get their gallop?"

"Well then, Sir," asked Welford, "what have you done?"

"Something to tell about, Sir, for the

next month; twenty miles, Sir, in an hour and forty minutes, and there's his head hanging behind Jack's saddle. Found at Spirthill and killed him at St. Austin's. Put that in your hookah, Mr. Welford, and smoke it."

"Slow of course, Mr. White, or you would not have been there."

"I was not there, Sir," retorted the old sportsman; "twenty stone couldn't see such a thing — neither would you, light as you may be — none but a thorough good rider to hounds could have witnessed the finish of this magnificent run," with which he resumed his road.

On reaching the kennels Charley came out very obsequiously (having had due time for reflection), to take Edmund's horse, and touching his cap, said, "he hoped he had had a good run."

"Yes," was the short reply, "although you did your best to spoil it."

"I beg pardon, Sir, but I could not stop the hounds for a couple of miles, when I got back as fast as I could to join the pack."

"You need not tell any more lies about it," Edmund said, very gravely. "I have heard the truth, and the mischief you have done by lifting the young hounds on to hare."

"It wasn't my fault, Mr. Edmund, for Mr. Reginald would make me go on."

"You knew perfectly well," replied Edmund, "if you pretend to know your business as whipper-in, that it was your duty to maintain to the huntsman, and obey his orders instantly. I sent Jack to desire you to stop the hounds, and instead of doing so, you halloed them out of the covert, thinking to have a run by yourself. Now, Master Charley, I have only thus more to say, that the very next time you attempt to handle the hounds or disobey my orders in the most trivial matter, that time shall be the last you and I ever hunt together with my father's hounds—*you* shall leave them, or *I* will."

"I am very sorry, Mr. Edmund, to have given you offence, but it shall never again happen."

Charley saw clearly he had made a very great mistake in supposing Edmund would entirely overlook his offence, and he knew that, once resolved, he would keep his resolution. He knew also that his old master, having selected him to hunt the hounds, his own discharge would certainly follow any further deviation from duty; but he could not refrain afterwards venting his ill-humour on Jack, by accusing him of telling Mr. Edmund he would not stop the hounds if he could.

"I told him what you said," retorted Jack, "and no more; in course you know'd best what to do."

"I don't want you to teach me my business, Mr. Jack."

"And I don't want you to tell me mine, Mr. Charley," was the rejoinder; "I ain't whipper-in to you yet, and don't think you be likely to get the horn by sarving young master such tricks as you did to-day,—a pretty job I shall have again with them young hounds after being halloed on to hare, when they'd just got steady to a fox scent."

Further bandying of words between the two whips was cut short by the master entering the stable, who told Charley he wished to see him when the horses were made comfortable and littered down for the evening. But we need not repeat the lecture given him by his old master, to whom every servant in the establishment was very deeply attached, from his kind disposition, and almost paternal interest in their welfare.

Reginald, having an invitation to dine at Morton Grange that evening, avoided a meeting with his father, in the dread of a little lecture also; and being annoyed at the failure of his scheme, and greatly out of humour, he spoilt the sport of Chetwynd—as he had attempted to do that of his brother in the morning—whom he perceived intent on paying attentions to Edith Maxwell, by appropriating her to himself at the dinner table, and afterwards by sitting with her during the remainder of the evening.

The next morning being the Marquis

of Dunkerton's hunting day, Edmund's run was the general topic of conversation at the place of meeting, and many questions were asked of Tom Springfield, the only man in the field who had seen it from find to finish.

"Well then, it was a clipper, I suppose Tom," remarked the Captain, "and the pace good, eh?"

"Just as fast as hounds could go, Captain, and barring a couple of pulls up, at the gorse and Dropmore, I should not have been there to tell the tale. It was just the very best run I ever rode in my life, and the way in which Mr. Edmund finished him off at last shows what I always said of him, that if he did take to hunting hounds, he'd make the best huntsman of the day. He's very quiet with them, gives 'em time when they ought to have it — knows the run of a fox as well as old Will; but when the time comes for a spurt, he's just the quickest man I ever see. He won't have meddling or hark halloing, however, Cap-

tain, and he is right; so you may depend upon it, if Charley comes that dodge again he tried yesterday, you won't see him head whip another day."

"Oh! then we are to be kept in drill order now, Tom, eh?"

"Mr. Edmund, Captain, although very good-tempered, with as kind a heart as need be, won't stand any nonsense from anybody, as you knows; and there are some of his field that means to stick to him."

"You are one, I conclude, Springfield?"

"Just so, Sir, as I did yesterday, and means to do again to-morrow."

"Very well — you won't keep me in order though, Springfield."

"With Mr. Edmund's orders, Sir — as Charley don't seem very willing to attend to them—I shall prevent mischief being done, if I can help it."

"By which you will get into trouble yourself, Tom."

"I've two strongish arms to help me out of it, Captain, and don't mind a bit of

a turn up, to suit anybody, who's inclined to be uncivil; but Master Edmund shan't be put upon."

The opinion of Tom Springfield, who was well known in both hunts as a bruiser, in more respects than across country, produced the effect he desired, for he knew the cabal entered into by certain ill-disposed persons to spoil Edmund's sport; and the Captain rode off to report the information he had received to the Marquis, who, contrary to his expectation, declared his intention of hunting with Edmund the next day.

CHAPTER III.

THE news of Edmund's superior run having spread far and wide, his next fixture in the higher part of their country attracted a full attendance of sportsmen from both hunts; it being a common impression that one good day is almost sure to be succeeded by another. Why or wherefore no one acquainted with the mysteries of the "noble science" can tell, since, to afford good runs, there must of necessity be good, stout, well-seasoned foxes, and when one of this sort has been despatched, masters of hounds don't expect to find his brother in the next gorse brake.

It does not always follow as a matter of course that good hounds make good foxes; for, as with the human, so is it with the

vulpine race, a great diversity of opinion prevails as to the best mode of self-preservation. The generality of foxes are on the look out for earths or drains to hide their precious carcasses from view as quickly as possible. Others, bred in woodlands, retain their shelter by dodging and foiling the hounds; and a few—the *élite* of the fraternity — stretch boldly across the open, in the hope of beating their pursuers by speed and stout running.

Then we have the regulator of all sport—scent,—to damp or encourage our exertions, as the case may be, with the weather; and the odds against catching a good fox, on a bad scenting day, are about fifty to one in favour of the wily animal.

Will Lane's favourite opinion about scent was that it was in the *hair;* and according to his orthography and phraseology, this doctrine is not far from being right, since the scent of the animal exudes through the porous tissues of the skin, more than from the breath. The ground over which the animal travels has

a great deal to do with the scent, as well as the atmosphere, and the pace also at which he is going; for, as long as hounds can press their game, the scent will hold good; but when turning down wind, or loitering by the way, the case is reversed.

We will now return to Edmund Knightley. On his appearance at the place of meeting, within half a mile of a fine piece of gorse, lying on the side of a hill, which was the first draw that morning, a cheerful smile rested on his manly face, as he sat in his saddle, surrounded by eighteen couples of the lady pack, averaging in height rather above twenty-three inches. Charley is at some little distance, looking very serious, and Jack the picture of good humour. The turn out is as complete as need be,—the horses as well as hounds in first-rate condition, and looking well bred and fit to go. The men neatly dressed, and looking as if they had paid especial care to their toilet that morning. The Marquis scans the group with a master's eye, but there is

nothing he can detect out of place; — neither can the fastidious Sir Digby Colville.

"Well, Edmund," exclaimed the Marquis, riding up to shake hands with him, "I congratulate you on the success of your essay as huntsman, and hope you intend treating me to a gallop with another fox of the same sort."

"That, Dunkerton, would be no easy matter; but we will do our best to afford you sport."

After the quarter of an hour allowed for late comers, and the usual interchange of civilities, Edmund moved off for the gorse covert, into which the hounds immediately dashed, at a word or two from their young master, Charley riding away for the further end. There was no unnecessary noise or cracking of whips, and for a few minutes, stillness reigned around; men looked serious. The Irish Baronet remarked to the Marquis, "He is a cool, quiet hand for a novice; — there's no life in him; — your man Dick would crack a fox out of that gorse before Mr. Knightley finds him. He is only fit to hunt harriers."

"Softly, Colville," the Marquis replied, "we are come out to take a lesson, you know, and I rather think it has already commenced. Our young huntsman has been accustomed to fox-hounds ever since the day he could toddle into the kennel, when Will Lane used to take the child in his arms to see them; and he is not the sort of character to let anything pass without due observation: — now, what think you of that screech? The ladies are at him, and their huntsman too," as Edmund was seen jumping and springing his horse over the gorse.

The Marquis had taken up his position, at one end of the covert, where he was joined by several others, when Tom Springfield, riding down to him and taking off his hat, said, "Master Edmund's respects, my Lord, and he will be obliged if you will leave this corner open for the fox to break."

"Are you then head whip to-day, Tom?"

"No, my Lord — I am only a *yeoman pricker*."

"Well said, Tom Springfield! your old mare can verify that assertion, for you

prick her along with the spurs most confoundedly."

"I think, my Lord," Tom replied with a laugh, "she will want a new pair to-day."

"Well, your fox shall have free scope at this point, Tom," as the Marquis moved away;—"but I suppose you want to catch another in my country?"

"We don't care where he goes, my Lord, if we can catch him at last."

Tom Springfield now posted himself alone behind the high gorse just at the angle of the covert, where he could see everything below him without being himself seen, where he sat in his saddle, motionless as a statue; and whilst thus sitting we may give a slight sketch of him. He was a fine handsome young man, standing six feet two inches without his shoes, of exceedingly powerful frame-work, with great activity of limb. He was in his thirtieth year, and the son of a tenant of Mr. Knightley's, who rented a large farm of 500 acres, principally pasture land, the management of which devolved chiefly on Tom, who

possessed more than a common knowledge of his business, being thus early in life considered one of the best judges of cattle and stock in the whole county, as well as a clever agriculturist in other respects; so that Springfield's farm was cited as a model for others to imitate.

His father being in his seventieth year, and reputed rich, Tom was regarded — to use a homely phrase — "a young man well to do in the world," and a great match amongst farmers' wives and daughters, although, to use his own words, he had too many irons in the fire already to want another. Besides which, his mamma was not the best of tempers, and he knew a young wife would have a sorry time of it with her; for his father being an easy good-tempered man, Mrs. Springfield ruled the household.

Tom had remained stationary at his post some five or six minutes, when he saw the fox poke his nose out of the gorse to reconnoitre the ground, and seeing all clear, spring out quickly and away for the fence.

When safe on the other side, a view halloa greeted his ear, which gave wings to his flight, and brought the ladies out in a body, with their huntsman and Jack in close attendance.

"Now for a spurt, Mr. Edmund," said Tom, "'tis a young one this time, and he's got his mouth open already;" and before the rest of the field could molest them, the greater part being on the other side with Charley, the trio were a field ahead, with the hounds running, as Tom expressed it, "like blazes." The Captain, Sir Digby, with Reginald and Charley,—the first straining every effort to catch them—and in this order they went for five and thirty minutes, without a check, the ladies running from scent to view, and pulling down their fox in the open.

"That's just the ticket, Sir," cried Tom, who was third up at the finish; "the Captain won't call us slow coaches after this, I think, nor the Irish Baronet boast of his Leicestershire clippers. But here comes Mr. Reginald first, he has got the foot of

'em all to-day, and Charley close in his wake; I'll just give 'em a shriek, Sir, to wake up the Marquis, or he may think of going home because he couldn't catch us."

Tom's whoohoop roused up more than the Marquis to renewed exertions; for many were so far behind as to have given up all hopes of catching the hounds again, when Tom's yell set them going, to be there or thereabouts, and see a second fox found, if not the first eaten. Reginald, pleased at having distanced the Captain and Sir Digby, could not forbear, in the excitement of the moment, from expressing his delight at the burst, by saying—"Well done, Edmund!—you and Tom managed that very cleverly—I give you both credit for the performance."

"I'm glad you're pleased, Sir," Tom replied; "but where's the Captain?"

"He will be here presently, I suppose, Tom, but he got grassed by going too fast at a double, and that Irish Baronet had a noser at the same place."

By this time the gentlemen inquired after made their appearance, racing over

the last field neck and neck; but both pulled up directly they caught sight of the hounds, which, having eaten the fox, were now, some standing, some lying around their huntsman.

"Found an open drain, I conclude," the Captain said to Tom, when he came up.

"A good many," replied Tom laughing, "he's gone down the red lane."

"What! killed and eaten already, Springfield?"

"Just so, Sir, and we have been waiting the last ten minutes, to see how our field were coming in:—have you seen the Marquis lately, Captain?"

"He is on the road, as I heard a tremendous 'getting up stairs' between his Lordship and somebody else at a bullfincher about three fields behind."

"*Damsons* is very plentiful this year," remarked Tom, "but there is generally a pretty good crop in some places."

The Marquis having now arrived, not in the best humour, let loose at Springfield for spoiling his start.

"All fair, my Lord," Tom replied, "you would have spoilt ours, and we ain't so overburdened with foxes as to chop 'em in covert."

"You are an impudent dog, Tom Springfield; I shall speak to Mr. Knightley to keep you in better order."

"Much obliged, my Lord," returned Tom, touching his hat, "we will try to please you with our next,—and there he goes, by jingo;" —as a fresh one, disturbed from a thick hedge-row, crossed the corner of the field in view of the hounds, which set to work running at the top of their speed. "Now, my Lord," cried Tom, "we have all a fair start this time," which was not the case exactly with regard to wind, the horses of the first division having had the advantage of ten minutes breathing time, which enabled them to keep the lead; Sir Digby, the Captain, and a few others, straining in vain to beat them; both Edmund and his brother Reginald being mounted on thorough bred horses, as well as Charley, the first whip. The yeoman pricker spurred

on his old mare, and at the end of five miles, accomplished in sixteen minutes, the ladies, which no horse could catch, pulled down their second fox, before he could reach a large covert in the Marquis's country.

"A glorious finish by Jove, Edmund," cried Reginald. "We have given those horse-dealing fellows a thorough good dusting to-day, so don't draw again to oblige anybody."

"Well, Captain," asked Tom Springfield, as that individual rode up, "was that fast enough for you?"

"Quite, Tom—I think hounds could not go faster."

"Just my opinion, Captain;—you see they can run as well as hunt; but I'd rather have an hour and forty minutes with some difficulties in the way, to test the hounds and huntsmen, than such things as these we have had to-day,—galloping and spurring from find to finish."

The ceremonies attending the whoohoop were delayed for some little time, to enable

the Marquis and others of the second class riders to come up, on whose arrival the second fox was given to the hounds.

"Well, Edmund," the Marquis observed, "you have given us two splendid scurries this morning, and must confess your lady-pack can go the pace,—perhaps you may show us now how they hunt, as it is only one o'clock."

"We don't intend drawing again, Dunkerton, two foxes in one day, being the outside number we can afford to kill,—independent of which, our next fixture is made already for Frampton Wood, the nearest covert we could draw, on this side of our country."

"I think you are quite right, Edmund," was his reply. "I for one, have had quite enough to breathe our horses."

"My Lord," the Captain observed, "I don't call this a day's sport?"

"Then pray, may I ask," Reginald said, "what Captain Duncombe *does* consider a day's sport?"

"Drawing of course till two or three o'clock in the afternoon," was his reply.

"*We* measure sport by its *merits*, not by the *hour*," Reginald remarked with a sneer, "and regret we cannot subscribe to Captain Duncombe's opinion. Come, Edmund, the governor says we cannot spoil our next fixture, to please any body. Good morning, Dunkerton, we will give you a slow thing from Frampton, if you will honour us again on Friday."

CHAPTER IV.

Aaron White gave his annual dinner-party like other great personages in high places, for Aaron was the premier of fox-hunters in those parts, being the oldest man who regularly attended the fox-hounds. As some little return for the many good dinners he enjoyed at other people's houses, Aaron invited them all to dine with him once a year, *en masse*, the week before Christmas; not that this was the only occasion when the spirit of hospitality acted upon him, for little bachelor dinner-parties formed the *rule*, not the exception, at Westwood Manor; the old squire seldom sitting down to a solitary meal at six o'clock, and when failing to find a friend in the hunting field willing to partake of his good cheer—

for Aaron lived upon the fat of the land—he would toddle down to the gate, which stood close to the parish road, about four o'clock in the afternoon of non-hunting days, with the hope of meeting some acquaintance, or even a decent traveller riding or driving by, to whom he courteously offered the rites of hospitality, with a shake-down for his horse.

His annual dinner had now however become a regular thing — an established custom for more than thirty years, and every gentleman of the hunt made a point of attending it. It was, as Aaron called it, a meet for the dog pack, no ladies being invited; for being still a bachelor the softer sex could not be included, and, as it was, the old dining-room barely sufficed to contain his male guests upon this occasion. Westwood was an old-fashioned looking place, suitable only to old-fashioned people; standing upon low ground, and abutting upon two roads, one parochial, the other dignified by the name of turnpike, although, save for a little more wheel room, the former

presented a more even surface than the latter, thanks to its proximity to Aaron White's residence; who, by dint of coaxing and scolding, had persuaded the farmers of his parish to mend their highways much more readily than their pastor could their private ways; although, it must be admitted, by the more potent argument of John Barleycorn, a powerful auxiliary, generally called in by the squire to determine little controversies of this kind with his neighbours. Notwithstanding its proximity to the aforesaid highways and byways, the front approach to the old mansion was barred by strong double doors, at either end of the carriage drive, a high wall occupying the space between, and extending quite round the lawn; the back entrance was guarded by a large white ferocious bull-dog, the terror of beggars and children, the very sight of Billy, as they peeped into the court-yard, being sufficient to deter the most brazen-faced from setting foot over the threshold of the dark green door, which generally stood invitingly half open. Billy

occupied a little snug stone hut, just in the corner under the window of the housekeeper's room; his tether of chain extending to within a few feet of the back door, and his barking and furious efforts to attach himself to the persons of strange intruders into his private domain, were sufficient to appal the stoutest heart; his frantic efforts to break his chain — looking from constant friction upon the gravel as smooth and white as old Peter's silver forks and spoons — were fearful to behold; for at every rush Billy performed a sort of *pirouette* in the air, coming down with his hind legs foremost, scratching and throwing up the dirt and gravel in a violent manner; and whilst people stood confronting this infuriated animal, dreading every fresh effort to disengage himself from his chain might prove the last, Ralph, the raven, would unperceived steal gently behind them, sending his sharp powerful beak into the calves of their legs; — for Ralph and Billy were great friends, and the bird seemed to enter into the dog's feelings, by aiding and abetting,

as far as in him lay, to drive strangers from the yard.

Ralph was a grave-looking, methodistical bird, like other personages of the household. There was something dignified in his deportment, even whilst sending his beak into people's legs. He performed this operation methodically, and with judge-like gravity, delivering his charge, and then stepping back with a knowing and consequential air, to see how it was received; at the same time there was a provoking leer in his upturned eye, plainly asking, "How do you like it?" Ralph would bite in his way, nearly as sharp as Billy, and it was highly amusing to see with what agility little boys, when calling for their jugs of skim milk, would skip about the yard, to avoid his treacherous attacks from behind.

Every one and every thing at Westwood looked old-fashioned. The head servants, butler and gardener, numbered as many years as their master, and it was nothing surprising that they looked staid and demure with their silvery locks; but

Richard the footman, and Jim the groom, neither of whom had attained the age of thirty, looked equally stiff and antiquated in their old style of dress, cut out after the antique and time-honoured fashion, from which the old Squire would permit no deviation; and ensconced in which, the boy of all work under Richard, commonly called Dolliger, but whose Christian name was Adonijah, presented as long a visage, when assisting at the dinner table, as his instructor Peter the great, who was of somewhat the same corporeal dimensions as his master. Mrs. Wise the housekeeper, when seated in her high-backed arm-chair, and dressed in her laced cap and frill, resembled the bird of wisdom of the white species, with his sharp beak and large grey eyes; a strange contrast to Peggy the cook, a big, burly, bustling woman — fair, fat, and forty, — who presided over the culinary department with the air and dignity of a dowager duchess. Her kitchen was the picture of comfort and cleanliness, everything being arranged in punctilious order.

The two shelves of pewter plates ranged over the dresser had, from long use and constant cleaning, assumed almost the appearance of silver; and so bright were the metal covers of all sizes,—from that capacious enough to conceal a haunch of venison, down to protecting a hot mutton chop in its transit from the kitchen—that they hung suspended against the wall like so many old-fashioned mirrors.

The only other legalised occupier of the kitchen besides Peggy and Dolly, the scullion and dairy-maid—a blooming round-faced wench, with dark eyes and luxuriant black tresses—was a large white cat, sitting as composedly upon a stool near the fire as if the house and all it contained belonged to her, and not pussy to the house. Peggy permitted no one else to intrude upon her privacy, except during business hours, that is, dishing-up time; all the male portion of the household, save Peter, being obliged to content themselves in the servant's hall; although Richard the footman and Jim the groom would venture in occasionally

to get a chat with Dolly on the sly when Peggy was out of the way.

"I won't have them men littering about the kitchen," she would say, when the mark of their shoes upon her smooth, white, stone floor caught her eye; "they be always a hankering arter you, Miss Dolly, and I won't ha' it. Them sloe black eyes of your'n will bring ye into trouble, if thee'lt 'courage the men to be peering into 'em; thee beest too young by a score o' years to think o' marrying yet, and I tell 'ee no good 'll come on it."

It was the morning now of Aaron's grand annual festival, and Peggy and Dolly had been at work two hours by candlelight in getting things forward for the feast. There was a deal to be done that day, and scarcely time for their own breakfast and dinner. There were the plum puddings, new college puddings, and other puddings to be got ready, for Aaron dealt largely in the substantials of every kind. Mrs. Wise too was busy with her jellies, blancmanges, trifle and mince pies, and other confec-

tionary appertaining to her department. Richard was burnishing up his forks and spoons, and Dolliger, the boy, upon his legs the live-long day running hither and thither.

Six o'clock at last arrived, and at the head of his table, faced by the master of the foxhounds, old Squire White took his seat, flanked on either side by a dozen of his friends and neighbours, among whom were the two younger Knightleys, Colonel Maxwell, Chetwynd, Welford, Addleby, Major Townshend, and other members of the hunt. Grace was said by the little vicar; the covers of two large soup-tureens, of solid silver, heirlooms in the family, were simultaneously removed by Peter and Richard, sending forth a thick fragrant steam of mock-turtle, and rich gravy soups. When the contents of these had been dispensed to all around, two huge dishes of turbot and cod-fish were ushered in, with the same precise movement, occupying the place upon the table where the tureens had lately stood, and with these

now commenced Peter's busy time, in handing round milk-punch, and sherry.

"I am sorry to say, Knightley," the jolly old Squire remarked, "that case of champagne, which I ought perhaps to have tasted long ago, has not yet been loosed out of dock, but milk punch is not, I believe, a very bad substitute at this time of year."

"Capital, White, nothing can be better, and as to champagne, I don't think it's worth your paying the duty upon it, as long as you have a cargo in hand of such soft milky stuff as this; and I must trouble Peter for a second glass."

"Ay, ay, Knightley, glad to see you like it; no poison in that cup, home manufactured; a bottle of it wouldn't hurt any man's feelings the next morning."

"By gad, Sir!" exclaimed the Major, "if my mother had nourished me with such lacteal fluid as this, I shouldn't have been weaned by this time."

The hum of cheerful voices now commenced all round the table, and a huge sirloin of beef smoked upon the board, with

its *vis-à-vis* of a turkey, weighing before dressed twenty-five pounds; the rest of the fare equally solid.

"We live in a plain old-fashioned manner, Mr. Welford," the host said, "and I fear our substantials may not comport with the tastes of those who are accustomed to French kickshaws. My housekeeper and cook belong to the old school, with the knowledge of only plain roast and boiled."

"Which I think they exercise to perfection, Mr. White, for we seldom find French *artistes* who can send up joints or poultry in such perfect style as yours are done."

"Ay, ay, Sir; Peggy has the art at least of doing things to a turn, well done, not overdone into rags and tatters, and she's her hands pretty full of work to-day, for there's another lot of hungry hounds to be let in upon the troughs, after the dainty ones have picked out the tit-bits. There's Charley and Jack, with the keepers and earth-stoppers, at the long table in the servant's hall, to begin their work when we have done, and another such dinner as this

prepared for them. We keep it up pretty late Mr. Welford on the '*nanniversary*,' as Will calls it; but there's a morning moon, Sir, to light folks home who feel a little staggery."

The more substantial viands had been removed for game and wild fowl, plum puddings, new college ditto, large trembling moulds of jelly, blancmange, &c., with mince pies, &c. for side dishes; the centre of the table being occupied by a large silver epergne, bearing a deep glass dish of trifle. The old squire did not press his guests to take wine, leaving every man to follow the bent of his own inclination; but when cheese was placed upon the table, for he would have everything done in old style, half of an old Cheshire at top and a large mellow cream, one from his own dairy, at the bottom, every man knew it was expected he should swallow the contents of the tall spiral glass handed to him by Peter, with the ears of barley prettily stamped upon its brim; and few would decline, who had become previously acquainted with its fla-

vour, to taste the light amber-coloured liquid offered with old Peter's insinuating and persuasive smile. Up to this time, however, all had enjoyed their freedom of action; but when the dessert had been placed on the table, an uneasy glance was directed by Welford towards a silver fox's head, which Peter had set up beside his master's plate, well knowing the rule of the house as regarded this little ornamental drinking cup.

"Ah! Mr. Welford," the Squire said, catching his eye; "I believe you do not quite like my little friend here on my right hand, a little too bacchanalian, I fear; but we excused you the last time on the plea of ill-health, and the same indulgence shall be granted now, although a bit of that anchovy toast will give it a relish. You have your choice, however, water or wine."

"Thank you," Welford said, "of the two, if needs be, I prefer a draught of water."

Our host had now risen, and, after a hem and haw, said, "As good wine needs

no bush, gentlemen, there is no necessity for my enlarging upon the merits of fox-hunting in the presence of fox-hunters. I shall therefore drink the toast with the usual honours, and I hope, as long as life and health are given me, to have the pleasure of seeing you all here, at my little annual gathering of friends and brother sportsmen. I drink success to fox-hunting, my friends, and may its shadow never grow less!"

The cup was raised to his lips with a steady hand, the contents drained to the last drop, and the cup then handed to his next neighbour, Peter standing obsequiously at his elbow, with a fresh half-pint bottle of old port wine, which was used only upon this occasion.

"Ay, ay, Colonel," remarked the host, "you have known the flavour of that vintage before this night. It is not corked I hope?" as he took a draught first, and then set it down to rest awhile on the table, still supported by his right hand.

"Oh no, White, good as ever, so good

that I enjoy the aroma, it is as sweet as a bouquet of flowers."

"Never make two bites at a cherry, Maxwell; the old cup, which stands there on the sideboard, holds a full bottle, but to suit the present generation, who haven't half the hearts or heads of their fathers, I have lowered the measure to just half-a-pint; and if a man can't put that out of sight pretty quickly, he hasn't much business in the hunting field, according to my ideas."

"I conclude, Sir," the Captain observed, addressing his host, "that the old gentleman, who is looking down so complacently upon us from the canvas opposite to me, has often handled that cup upon the sideboard, but from the dents in the picture he seems to have met with rough usage."

"Yes, Captain Duncombe, that is my disgraceful work, for many's the bottle of wine that has been shied at his head by his scapegrace of a grandson, when I was a youngster like yourself, with an empty head upon my shoulders, for entailing this

house and property, and cutting me out from doing with it as I then wished. Yes, Sir, this unworthy hand has dealt him many a hard blow, but I have dealt myself harder since — *here*, Sir," laying his large bony fist upon his heart. "Our young warm blood leads us all astray; we want to have things our own way, like young impetuous hounds, impatient of restraint; but there's many a day I've seen, when, but for old Solomon putting them right upon the line again, and curbing their hot fancies with a bad scent, we should have gone home without our fox's head. And you, Captain, are a deal too hasty sometimes, making more rents than you can mend. It won't do, Sir, pull up, and give them time, if you would have the name of a good sportsman."

"I hope to profit by your advice for the future, Sir," the Captain replied.

"Glad to hear so wise a resolve, and hope you won't forget it, when we next meet at Skurry Gorse."

The next toast proposed that evening by the old Squire — "The Master of the

Fox-hounds" was received with rapturous applause, and no sooner had the plaudits died away than their echo was borne back from the servant's hall with a loud ringing cheer which pierced through every ear.

"Ay, ay, gentlemen," cried the old Squire, rubbing his hands with great glee, "Charles has found his fox at last, and the other dog pack are running right merrily now!"

CHAPTER V.

Our friend Alphonso did not recover from the pommelling he received in his fall with Mameluke for more than a week, and feeling very sore, in more respects than one, expressed his disgust of hunting altogether, telling the Captain he should sell his horses and retire from the field.

"Oh! of course," replied Duncombe, "and realise the predictions of your enemies, that you are a chicken-hearted fellow and afraid of a fall. What are your few bruises in comparison with Will Lane's broken ribs?—for which he has to thank you, since you rode right across him, and knocked him over."

"Reginald Knightley served me the same trick then—so we are quits on that score."

"No you are not, Master Jack, but a long way from it; Knightley saw you were intending to cross him also, and by waiting his time, caught you cleverly on the hop. That's how it happened, and he served you quite right — tit for tat, my boy, that's all. So now I will trouble you to enclose a ten pound-note to Will Lane, regretting the accident, and hoping he is in a fair way of recovery. You should have done this the next day, but it is not too late now. This will bring you into favour with Mr. Knightley, who is generosity itself, and he will know how to appreciate good feeling in others."

"Well, Duncombe, I will do as you suggest directly, but I won't go out hunting again with their hounds."

"Because you are afraid of being horsewhipped by Reginald, I conclude, as everyone else will also."

"I don't care a d——n for Reginald, or all the Knightleys put together," replied Jack, waxing bumptious.

"If you will repeat that boast in the

presence of any one of the Knightley family, Jack, I will believe you mean what you say; but on one point I am quite satisfied, that not one of them cares a rap for you, unless you get in their way; so don't imagine it to be any concern of theirs whether you hunt with their hounds or not. Your fellow Oxonian has, however, created quite a sensation in the sporting world, and it has become the fashion to hunt with him, in preference to the Marquis; in short, the Marquis himself patronises him nearly every week, so take wit in your anger and come out with him again."

"If I must hunt," replied Alphonso, "I shall meet the Marquis; but how about the hunt ball? my mother wants to go also, and the governor."

"Very well, I will get tickets for them and you,—it will be a grand affair, half the country there. By the way, Jack, which of the young ladies do you mean to patronise?"

"Why, upon reflection, I think, Miss Maxwell, will suit me best. Lady Agnes by all accounts is too much of a high-flyer

to marry a commoner, and from what I saw of her at Morton Grange, I don't like her half as well as Edith. We got on uncommonly well together the last time I dined with them, and I begin to think she is in love with me already."

"The deuce you do, and what makes you think so?"

"Why, you see, Duncombe, she colours up when we first meet, and seems very shy of me sometimes when I am talking to her; and I have heard mother say that is a sure sign of a girl liking a man."

"Well then, when is the governor to pop the question for you?"

"I think I can manage that little matter better by myself; and mother says, she should like to meet her first at the ball, and see how she behaves there, as very pretty girls often turn out very great flirts."

"Of course, there is nothing like looking a horse well over, and seeing his paces, before purchasing: and I daresay your mamma is a better judge of young ladies than her son is of horseflesh. So now,

good morning, and tell your governor I will dine with him to-morrow evening."

On leaving Hardington, Duncombe rode straight away for Morton Grange, unburdening his mind by muttering certain anathemas against his friend Alphonso. "By gad, that fellow's impudence does astonish one! Edith Maxwell, indeed, in love with such an unlicked cub as that! By Jove! it's enough to make a cat laugh! and yet money may do it. I must look alive, there's no time to be lost now!"

The Captain's present intention was to sound Edith on this matter, but, to his surprise, he found her occupied in receiving a lesson in sketching from Mr. Chetwynd, whom he knew only by sight. On his entering the drawing-room, however, Edith rose to meet him, with her usual sweet smile, though in Mrs. Maxwell's manner a little more formality was perceptible; and as Edith appeared disinclined to leave her occupation, the Captain was perforce constrained to address his observations on the weather, &c., to Mrs.

Maxwell, and he sat on, in the hope of seeing the drawing lesson finished, and Mr. Chetwynd's horse at the hall door.

It was now about twelve o'clock, he had called thus early, to find the young lady at home, intending also to take luncheon there, which he had been generally asked to do. He was not asked now, yet still held on until it was announced; but Chetwynd remained and took luncheon also, and after it was over, the carriage came round to take Mrs. Maxwell and Edith over to Dropmore. The Captain, not being invited to join the party, felt exceedingly disgusted, twisted his moustache, tapped his leg with his riding whip, and began humming an opera air; when suddenly recollecting himself, he apologised to Mrs. Maxwell for absence of mind, it having just then occurred to him that he had forgotten an engagement, and abruptly wished her and Edith good morning, giving Chetwynd a look of defiance as he passed.

The Captain's reflections on his road

home were not of the most pleasant nature. Here was another rich man evidently standing in his path, far more dangerous than Alphonso; but still believing Edith preferred his society to any other person's, he set his brain to work out his new rival's discomfiture.

The following evening, when dining with Mr. Shuttleworth, he again alluded to Rushmeed farm, by saying that another party had made an offer for it, and unless Mr. Shuttleworth came to terms without delay, with Farmer Perrin, it would be disposed of. This communication produced the desired effect upon the money maker, whose agent concluded the bargain the very next day by paying a deposit on the purchase; but the land was not to change owners until the following Lady-day. The particulars of this transaction were known only to the Captain, who now waited his opportunity to turn this information to some account, feeling assured a rupture must ensue thereon between the Colonel and Mr. Shuttleworth, which would

secure him from any further advances on the part of his esteemed friend Alphonso.

His mind being set at rest on this point, his next effort was directed against Mr. Chetwynd, about whom he made diligent inquiries. Lady Agnes had been made acquainted by Edmund with Chetwynd's visits to Morton Grange, which opened her eyes to his real intentions, causing her considerable annoyance; and Edith's disinclination to renew her visit to Woodborough, added confirmation to her previous impressions, that her friend, although denying it, had secretly given encouragement to Mr. Chetwynd's advances, from their first *tête-à-tête* in the conservatory at Dropmore—and things continued in this unsatisfactory state until the night of the Hunt ball.

Now a county or hunt ball is an event of great importance to young ladies and single gentlemen, where they expect to see a great many people who live out of visiting distance, as well as those in whom they take a deeper interest. They also feel at liberty in a ball room to do a little bit of flirtation

which could not be safely done under the surveillance of mammas and papas at home, or at a dinner-party, or even after dinner; which are the only opportunities they have of meeting in the country — save and except an occasional pic-nic or archery meeting; —for unless quite unexceptionable as to their means of providing for a wife, mammas take good care not to allow young gentlemen to be left alone with their daughters during morning calls.

The Captain had made two unsuccessful attempts at a private conference with Edith, but on both occasions Mrs. Maxwell pertinaciously adhered to her seat, the whole time of his visit; so that he perceived the ball was his only chance. Sir Digby Colville also looked forward to the ball, as of considerable importance to himself; and Lady Agnes, piqued at Chetwynd's non-appreciation of her charms, longed for the ball, when she might show him how she was admired by others. Alphonso also longed for the ball, to dance with Edith, and get her into some quiet corner, where he might

feast on her beauty, as Johnny Horner did on his Christmas pie. Mrs. Shuttleworth was eager for the ball, to display her diamonds to the haughty dames of the country who had not called upon her. Well, and Edith too — she rather longed for the ball — not to flirt or dance with any gentleman in particular, but because she was fond of music and dancing.

A county ball is the arena on which all the young ladies for miles round are openly presented to view. Scores and hundreds would pine in single blessedness, and their beauty fade away in lonely places, — seen only by a few country neighbours, — whose parents cannot afford taking them to London or watering places — save for the county ball. What chance was there of the Misses Duncombe getting off hand except at the county ball? They were too well known in their narrow circle of neighbours to be caught up there—but at the ball they would meet strangers from other parts of the country, who might be fascinated by their charms. In short, a county ball may

be not unaptly likened to a horse-fair, where all the nags are furbished up, and decked out to the best advantage — and we know that many a horse too well known to be sold at home, goes off at the fair.

On the night of *our* hunt ball, the Captain, arrayed in his splendid uniform, was waiting at an early hour in the lobby, to engage Edith Maxwell for the first or second dance, knowing that on entering the room, she would be directly assailed by many solicitations of this kind, from her numerous admirers — for Edith's beauty had been the theme of conversation amongst the young men of the country since her first introduction.

On the Captain making his bow, and asking her for the honour of the first dance, he was informed that favour had been already granted to Mr. Chetwynd — but the promise of the second consoled him for his first disappointment, — with which he made off, not to seek another partner, but to hover near, and watch her manner and looks when dancing with his rival. Now

Chetwynd had never entered a dancing academy in his life, and dancing over the prairies in the far west is a very different thing to measuring one's steps on the floor of a ball-room. Chetwynd proved, therefore, rather an awkward partner, which the lynx-eyed Captain was not slow to perceive; and Edith's sly laugh at one or two *gaucheries* he committed, induced him to think she was not yet in love with Mr. Chetwynd, — so that, on obtaining her arm, he remarked, "Your first partner does not show to much advantage in a ball-room — or perhaps he was intent on exhibiting the steps of the Cherokee Indians in their war dance, from whom he has borrowed some other rather strange ideas also."

"To what ideas do you allude?" Edith asked.

"About religion," the Captain replied. "Perhaps you are not aware that he is a Deist, who laughs at church-going people. The clergyman of his parish was lamenting to me, the other day, that Mr. Chetwynd had never entered the church since his

return to Dropmore, and when venturing to remonstrate with him on this neglect of duty, and the evil influences it would produce on his poorer parishioners, he was met by a violent outbreak of temper."

"I am quite astonished to hear such an account of Mr. Chetwynd," Edith said gravely; "for he appears very amiable."

"In ladies' society," added Duncombe,—"although I should think, that unless blinded by prejudices, or some other softer feeling, any lady might gather from his look that he is not good-tempered;—but no doubt Miss Maxwell has the power of converting the heathen to Christianity, and rendering him as harmless as one of his stuffed tigers."

"I really do not comprehend your meaning, Captain Duncombe. Mr. Chetwynd is a recent acquaintance, and you cannot suppose I should presume to speak to him on such a subject as his religion."

Duncombe continued—"He gives you lessons in drawing; why should you not, in return, give him a lesson on theology?"

"He has given me only one lesson, which

you saw," Edith replied, "and that was neither solicited nor desired by me."

"Ah! indeed! — well, the world is given to tell tales! — since it is reported that Mr. Chetwynd had laid himself, with his buffaloes, lions and tigers, at your feet, all of which, you had been most graciously pleased to accept, as well as a most costly Indian shawl."

"I did accept, with Lady Agnes, an Indian shawl, as a loan on the cold day we first called at Dropmore; but not as a present — since it was left by me at Woodborough to be returned; and as to the report you have mentioned, there is not a word of truth in it."

"For your sake, I am rejoiced to hear it," the Captain replied, "for even to a man, there is something dreadful in the idea of marrying a heathen."

Having thus expressed his opinion, he turned to other topics of conversation, until the close of the quadrille, when he said, with his most insinuating smile, "I suppose I must not ask for a second dance this evening?"

"Perhaps you had better not," she replied with a laugh; "it will save me the unpleasantness of a refusal, as I scarcely know for how many I am engaged."

"Well, then, will you think of poor me, if the list is not quite filled up; for I do not care about dancing with any other girl in the room except yourself?"

"I suppose," said Edith, "I must reward you for that gallant speech, if possible; but at present I can make no promise."

We must now turn our attention to Lady Agnes, who had renewed her flirtation with Sir Digby, to the extent of attracting very general observation, and greatly to Edmund's annoyance, who did not expect a repetition of the scene at their first ball. The Earl was not present on this occasion, and Mrs. Knightley having consented to act as her chaperon, Lady Agnes felt more at liberty to follow the bias of her own inclinations; as for Chetwynd, she refused point-blank to dance with him at all, without even the usual excuse of being engaged. Edmund and

Edith were also both out of favour, and with the purpose of vexing them, knowing their objection to Sir Digby, the spoilt beauty flirted with him the more, the consequence of which was, that the Irish Baronet, with the impetuosity of his countrymen, proceeded almost to the length of a proposal.

Our friend Alphonso had primed himself at supper with a sufficient quantity of wine to proceed to like extremities with Edith, to whom he paid all the compliments his heavy head could devise; but in attempting to say something more sentimental than common, Edith could no longer restrain a laugh at his failure, which so discomposed our hero, that his heart failed him at the critical moment. *Vox faucibus hæsit*—Anglicè—he could not get it out.

"Well, Alphonso," asked his mamma after the quadrille, "have you done what you said you would?"

"No, mother," he replied in a low tone, "I made a hash of it by saying something very silly, which made her laugh, and I could not then go on."

"Well, Alphonso, I daresay the young lady guessed what you intended, and laughed at your want of courage to speak out."

"There, mother, it can't be helped now, I must wait for Dunkerton's fête, or some other opportunity."

"She will be snapped up before that time by some of these gay sparks, buzzing about her like bees round a jar of honey, and so, my dear boy, you'd better let papa speak to the Colonel, as you seem so afraid of speaking to the young lady. There's nobody like her in the whole room; and as for that Lady Hagnes, she's a hoity-toity, flirting, flaunting Miss, and not to be mentioned on the same day of the week with Miss Hedith."

But notwithstanding Mrs. Shuttleworth's hopes and expectations with regard to her son, the Captain considered *himself* the most favoured of all Miss Maxwell's partners at the close of the Hunt ball; and, truth to speak, he was not far wrong in his reckoning at that time.

CHAPTER VI.

EDMUND'S state of mind, after the renewed flirtation of Lady Agnes with Sir Digby Colville, may be more easily imagined than described; and to a man of his particular ideas about women, her conduct was most objectionable, unless she intended giving serious encouragement to his addresses. The veil had been removed from his eyes since her first introduction to the world, and as her true character became more clearly developed, the spell cast over him by her youthful charms was beginning to lose its effect. The contrast between her manners and those of Edith Maxwell had never struck him so forcibly as at the Hunt ball, and to judge by the numerous suitors for her hand in every dance, and the observa-

tions which reached his ear, Edith's modest, unassuming loveliness attracted many more admirers than the dazzling beauty of Lady Agnes; and as to disposition, he knew too well the marked difference between them.

"Notwithstanding," Edmund would exclaim in the words of Byron, "*Agnes*, with all thy faults, I love thee still;" but the question must be now resolved, whether she loved him, on which point doubts had lately arisen in his mind, rendering this state of suspense no longer endurable. At first Edmund thought of speaking to the Earl before making a declaration of his passion to his daughter. This was the most honourable course for him to pursue, although well aware of her father's preference for himself; but there were other considerations which induced him to act otherwise. He could not avail himself of the Earl's influence over his daughter, and if rejected, he might be spared the unpleasant discovery of his refusal by his child. Edmund, therefore, sought an op-

portunity of meeting Lady Agnes alone in the garden one afternoon, about a week after the Hunt ball, when, with all the impassioned eloquence of a first love, he poured forth the long subdued feelings of his heart.

Lady Agnes listened to his address at first with surprise; and then with a laugh which sent the blood rushing to his forehead, said, "You silly boy, how can you talk such nonsense to me, who have always regarded you as a brother; pray let me hear no more on this subject."

Not the words, so much as the careless ironical tone and manner with which they were spoken, sealed at once the lips and extinguished every hope in the hitherto sanguine mind of Edmund Knightley; when Lady Agnes, taking advantage of his silence, added, "Come, Edmund, let us remain the friends we were before, for I never have and never can think of you in any other light."

Edmund still continued silently walking by her side, until they reached the hall

door, but no other word proceeded from his lips; his heart was overwhelmed with conflicting emotions, and too full to give utterance to his feelings, and having opened the door for her, with a deep-drawn sigh, that spoke more forcibly than words the anguish of his heart, he turned again down the steps, walking hastily to the stables, mounted his horse and rode rapidly away.

To those who, like him, have experienced the bitter disappointment of a first unrequited attachment, his state of mind will be easily understood; but few, perhaps, in a similar situation have had to support the additional burden of insult, to which he had been obliged to submit, from one whom he had ever regarded with the tenderest affection since early boyhood. This was the blow, which, like that dealt by Brutus, paralysed his efforts at resistance; at such a moment anger or resentment found no place in his heart. He saw at once that further pleading would be useless. His eyes were opened to his

true position—Agnes had never loved him—not even with the affection of a sister or friend. She made no attempt to soothe the bitterness of his disappointment, but rather appeared to exult in the pain she had inflicted. Although haughty and pettish, he had believed her possessed of a woman's heart, and that she would pity and alleviate his distress, if she could not remove it. It was true, upon reflection, she had altered her tone, and asked to be regarded still as his friend—but was not even such a proposal hollow and insulting? Had she ever regarded him in that light, she must have sympathised with him at such a moment. But he knew the cause of this afterthought—the dread of her father's displeasure. It proceeded from no feeling of compassion or consideration for himself. The idol he had blindly worshipped, idolised as a warm-hearted, generous, though wayward girl, was now broken in pieces, displayed to his astonished vision in all its deformity. He had bowed himself down, like a besotted heathen,

before a finely chiselled, beautiful painted image, which he now discovered to be a mere block of stone. But older and wiser men than Edmund Knightley have had their mental vision blinded, and their senses bewildered, by woman's beauty. On reaching home, Edmund's pale and haggard looks were noticed by his sister Emmeline, who, meeting him in the hall, exclaimed, "My dear Edmund, what has happened? you look so ill and agitated."

"I am not ill, dear Emmy," he replied in as careless a tone as he could assume, "but I have been a good deal worried to-day;" and he began ascending the staircase to avoid further questions.

His sister said no more, but in a few minutes her gentle knock was heard at her brother's door, which, after a little parley and attempted resistance, was at last opened for her admission. On entering the room his things lay scattered about in various directions, one look at which by his sister revealed her brother's intentions; and the tears still standing in

his eyes, though he turned away his head to avoid her seeing, them betrayed to her what had occurred.

Taking his hand in one of hers, with the other laid gently on his shoulder, she said in the most soft and soothing accent, "My own dear Edmund, do you love your sister?"

There was no resisting that appeal; for a second only he gazed on her beautiful features and melting eyes, fixed lovingly on his face, and then, bursting into tears, caught her to his heart.

"Dear, dear Edmund," she whispered, as her tears mingled with his, "I know what has so distressed you. Come, my dearest brother, let us sit down on the sofa. You must not leave home."

"Indeed I must, dearest Emmy, for the present. I cannot remain here now."

We need not relate the whole conversation between the brother and sister; it may suffice to state that Emmeline drew by degrees a full revelation from Edmund of the scene between Lady Agnes and

himself, and the cold insulting manner in which she had rejected his suit; when she said indignantly, "And for this heartless girl, my own beloved brother, you would leave your dear affectionate father and mother, and poor sister Emmeline?"

"No, dearest Emmy, not now; your gentle pleading has not been in vain. I see my folly in having madly loved one who has never returned my affection, and now treats it with ridicule and contempt."

"There is one, dear Edmund, far more lovely, more amiable, and more affectionate, from whom, had your choice happily so fallen, you might justly have expected all the blessings and happiness which this world can confer."

"I know to whom you allude, dear Emmy, for the contrast between these two girls has also often struck me, although then under the influence of blind and misguided passion; but do not now, my own dear sister, talk to me of other love."

"And yet, dear Edmund, I have long foreseen that your misplaced affections

would meet with this return; and believe me, my dear brother, although you may not admit it now, the time will come when you will look back upon this, which you now consider a grievous affliction, as a providential escape from a wretched union, by which your whole future life would be embittered. Lady Agnes is not the person to suit yonr ideas or disposition. She is selfish, self-willed, and haughty, frivolous and bad-tempered. What prospect of happiness could you reasonably entertain with such a wife? Indeed, my dear Edmund," she added in a more cheerful tone, "you have had a most fortunate escape; and now Teddy, dear," she said playfully, "rouse yourself from this deceptive dream, in which you have too long indulged, and prove yourself a man, instead of the 'silly boy' she called you, to fret and cry about the loss of a worthless toy. Lady Agnes dare not reveal what has passed between you to-day, and pray do not you by your looks or conduct give others reason t suspect what has occurred. You have

sufficient excuse, were any needed, to spend more of your time at home than at Woodborough, since poor Will Lane is still incapable of resuming his place in the hunting-field; and your rejection by his daughter—for she had of course a right to accept or refuse your proposal—will I hope cause no difference in your behaviour to the dear old Earl, who loves you as his own son; you must, if possible, spare him the sorrow of knowing that, which I feel assured would grieve him to the heart. Neither must you absent yourself entirely from Woodborough, or he will guess the cause; and as Lady Agnes has treated you so lightly and cavalierly, your proper pride, dear Edmund, ought to suggest to you a similar line of conduct."

The wholesome counsel of his beloved and affectionate sister produced the effect she desired upon her brother, who, upon reflection, after the first burst of outraged feelings and disappointed hopes, was obliged to acknowledge that he had never received the slightest encouragement from Lady

Agnes to persevere in his suit. The love had been all on his side, and the conviction began gradually to steal over his mind that he had been guilty of great folly in proposing, with the certainty almost of being rejected.

We must now take a glance at Woodborough on the evening of Edmund's abrupt departure. He had been expected to dine there, but when the dinner hour arrived, the Earl, who had seen him walking with his daughter in the pleasure grounds, began to question her as to the cause of his absence.

"What has become of Edmund?" he inquired, when the family had assembled in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Errington did not know.

"Agnes," said the Earl rather pointedly, "did Edmund tell you he should not dine here this evening, as you were walking together, not more than two hours since?"

"No, papa; he said nothing about dining here."

"But you know, Agnes, he had promised

to remain, and Edmund never breaks his engagements. Something very unusual must have occurred to make him do so now; do you know the cause, Agnes!" and his eyes were turned full upon her face.

Agnes made no reply, but blushing scarlet, fixed her eyes upon the carpet.

At this moment a significant look from Mrs. Errington satisfied the Earl that her conjectures corresponded with his own, and the confusion of Lady Agnes, coupled with Edmund's abrupt departure from Woodborough, without a word of explanation to either of them, could be accounted for only in one way,—his rejection by Lady Agnes.

No further remark escaped the Earl during the dinner-hour; but that sad, gloomy silence was more distressing to his daughter than the most severe reproof. She read in his melancholy looks and averted eye the pain she had inflicted on her too fond, indulgent father by the refusal of his beloved godson, and the heartless manner which had accompanied that refusal

smote her now as unworthy of herself, and insulting to him, whom, if not to love, she had every reason to respect. She might have spared his feelings that bitter, taunting laugh, which had struck like a dagger to his heart, and rendered him speechless in her presence. She saw the iron aimed by her hand had entered his soul; it had been a moment to her of proud revenge, to humble him in the dust for presuming to speak of her flirtation with Sir Digby Colville. She had had her revenge; to her it was sweet for the moment; but for the moment only. The next brought as quick repentance for her unfeeling conduct towards the friend and companion of her youth.

As they walked side by side towards the house, she longed to say something in palliation of her bitter irony, but pride sealed her lips. She walked slowly in the hope, yes, in the hope, that Edmund would say something more; his silence was irksome to her now, but nought save the sound of that deep-drawn sigh reached her ear. In

after years, when the day-dreams of youth had passed away, when the beauty, of which she was now so proud, had faded, the remembrance of that scene and sigh haunted her like a dark vision of the night; to the last day even of her existence it was not forgotten.

The sad, reproachful look with which Edmund regarded her, on parting at the hall door, went home to her heart; and when, reaching her room, she burst into tears, exclaiming, "Oh, Edmund! how have I in a moment of pique rewarded you for all your kind, generous feelings, and the deep interest you have ever taken in my happiness! I might have bid you still love me as a brother, and we might have yet remained friends, but now that hope is lost to me for ever!"

It was now that Lady Agnes felt also the estrangement of that other friend, the warm-hearted, gentle Edith, whose feelings she had also outraged. She at once wrote to her, asking forgiveness for her pettishness, and for her ill-natured and undeserved re-

marks; adding, that being ill and out of spirits, she hoped Edith would forget what had passed, and resume her visit to Woodborough, if only for a day or two.

This letter was answered immediately by Edith in person, who, incapable of harbouring resentment even for an hour, flew to the assistance of her friend, who, by the expressions used in her letter, she believed to be seriously unwell; and we need scarcely say that at this particular moment the visit of Edith Maxwell was hailed with delight by the Earl and Mrs. Errington, with whom this gentle, affectionate girl was an especial favourite, as well as with the whole household. Every servant in the establishment loved Miss Edith, to whom pride and haughtiness of demeanour were unknown, and who, anxious to spare them any extra trouble on her account, rewarded their attentions by gracious words, and a sweet smile, which went to the hearts of all.

The presence of Edith imparted something of her cheerfulness and good humour

even to Lady Agnes, who, however, carefully withheld any allusion to what had transpired between herself and Edmund. A week had now passed since this event, when the reluctance of Edmund to return to Woodborough, even for an hour, was overcome by his sister's remonstrances on his apparent neglect, and rudeness to his ever kind godfather.

"No other consideration on earth," replied Edmund, "should induce me to set foot in that hall again whilst she is there; but what can I say to my dear, kind godfather? Not for the world would I acquaint him with the heartlessness of his daughter; but my rejection by her cannot be concealed when we meet. I see, however, dear Emmy, that the evil hour cannot be longer deferred. Pride must be humbled, and I will endeavour to meet her with something like indifference. It is a hard task, dear Emmy, you will admit; but as to dining at Woodborough, that, my dear sister, is quite beyond my power of endurance yet."

"The Earl will not, I hope, ask you to do that, dear Edmund; and if he should, you can easily decline, as your father is far from well, and requires your attendance here."

With a sinking, sick sensation at heart, Edmund summoned resolution to ride over the next morning to Woodborough, hoping to meet the Earl in his usual after-breakfast walk to the farm; but as he turned the angle of the road, most unexpectedly Edith Maxwell met his view. His first impulse, in his then agitated state of mind, was to turn his horse, and fly even her presence; for he feared Lady Agnes had acquainted her with his rejection. A moment's reflection, however, on the cowardice and incivility of such an act, for Edith must have seen and recognised him, altered his purpose. There was another consideration, also, which induced him to proceed. Did Edith even know of his rejection, he felt sure of her secrecy and deep sympathy also, in his distressing position. As Edmund dismounted to take her

hand, his own trembled with a convulsive grasp in hers, his quivering lips and heightened colour betraying unusual emotion; but by a furtive glance at her face, he saw that hers also was suffused with a deep blush, and her agitation little less than his own.

"Where so early and alone?" he at last asked, in an assumed cheerful, though faltering tone of voice.

"I was going to see the shepherd's wife," she replied.

"Will my company be an intrusion, Edith?"

"Oh! no; I only wished to know how one of her children is who has been ill with fever."

"And are you not afraid of catching the infection, Edith?"

"We ought not to think of a little risk to ourselves, when others are in distress, and need our assistance," she replied.

"Yes, Edith, your life is too precious to all who know and love you, to be risked for a shepherd's child. I am glad to have

met you here, and cannot permit you to enter the cottage; the inquiries you wish shall be made by me, and I will take care that everything required shall be sent to the shepherd's family."

As they walked forward, Edmund's silence as to Lady Agnes, confirmed Edith's suspicions that some rupture had occurred between them, but of what nature she was ignorant, although, from his embarrassment at their first meeting, the true cause of his absence occurred to her; and after leaving the shepherd's house, they proceeded towards Woodborough Park, on reaching which they parted at the stables, Edmund going by the back entrance to the Earl's private room.

We need not describe the affecting interview between the poor old Earl and his beloved godson, from whom a reluctant confession was at last elicited, as to the cause of his late absence; but so far from alluding to his daughter's ill-timed levity, Edmund said all in his power to palliate her conduct.

"It was a sad mistake on my part, dear Uncle," he urged, "to talk of a different love to her, who has, perhaps, always regarded me as a brother; and to confess the truth, having these misgivings myself, I would not, as I ought to have done, consult you previously on the subject, before speaking to her."

"I fully understand your motives, my dear Edmund, in withholding this confession of your affection for my child, well knowing the pain her refusal of your suit would inflict upon myself; for this union of our children has been long dwelt upon by your father and me, who have witnessed your increasing attachment with the greatest pleasure, and we lived in the hope of seeing the accomplishment of our wishes. Even now, I do not yet despair of their being realised, for since your departure Agnes has been very dejected and thoughtful, more so than I have ever seen her before, and I really believe she already repents her too hasty decision."

"I dare not so hope, my dear Lord," Edmund replied sorrowfully.

"Then, to oblige me, Edmund, will you endeavour to forget what has passed, and continue your visits here as usual, if I am not asking you to do violence to your own feelings?"

"I fear, dear Uncle, Lady Agnes may have bestowed her affections on another, and will never alter her opinion of me."

"I know to whom you allude, Edmund; that spendthrift Irish Baronet; but I would rather almost see her in her grave than married to such a fortune-hunting man of the world, whose true character is well known to me. No, Edmund," the Earl continued vehemently; "my consent to her union with such a reprobate shall never be given."

"Oh! make not, my dear Lord, any rash vow; his character may have been misrepresented to you, as well as to me."

"I fear not, Edmund; yet I still hope the evil may be averted if you will return. Edith is now here, and I hope her influence

will also be of service to Agnes, for I know her dislike to Sir Digby Colville; but your continued absence would afford him greater hopes of success, since it will be certainly attributed to the true cause."

"It shall be then as you desire, my dear Uncle," Edmund at last said, "and the day after to-morrow I will promise to dine with you."

CHAPTER VII.

THE third morning after the occurrences related in the last chapter, as Colonel and Mrs. Maxwell were sitting at their breakfast table, the servant entered the room, with a letter from Mr. Shuttleworth, the purport of which was a proposal of marriage between our friend Alphonso and Edith, couched in these terms: —

"MY DEAR SIR,

"I am commissioned by my eldest son and heir, who is too bashful and nervous to address you himself on such a momentous subject, to ask the favour of your consent to his becoming a suitor for the hand of your daughter; and as he flatters himself that reciprocal sentiments already exist

between them, I shall feel obliged by your naming an early day for the adjustment of the preliminaries regarding settlements, &c., which I purpose making on such a liberal scale, that of course there can be no further impediment to the happiness of the young people.

"I am, dear Sir,

"Yours faithfully,

"T. SHUTTLEWORTH."

"Cool," remarked the Colonel to his wife, handing her the document; "deuced cool indeed! too cool by half!" he continued, his choler beginning to rise. "I call it impudent, my dear. What does the fellow mean by addressing me in this strain? as if my daughter, the daughter of a Maxwell, were to be bought, like a bale of cotton in market, by the highest bidder! I say it is downright insolence — give me the letter, my dear, or throw it into the fire."

"Stay, my dear Colonel, you are very excited this morning, and forget that Mr. Shuttleworth has not been accustomed to

the forms and etiquette of genteel society. He is a well-meaning man in his way, and of course intended no insult to us, and no doubt means to act very liberally in his settlement on a daughter-in-law, although his son is not the person I could approve, unless Edith is really attached to him."

"Do you then believe your daughter attached to this young fellow, madam?" asked the Colonel, as he rose from the table and began poking the fire very vehemently.

"No, Colonel, I believe she is not attached to any one."

"But my opinion of Edith is," resumed the Colonel, "that she has sufficient of her father's spirit neither to marry for money, nor beneath her position—and as she will inherit all my property, as well as yours, she has a right to aspire to a higher connection than that of a cotton-spinner. But I will ride over directly to Woodborough, and know Edith's true sentiments—so give me the letter."

"Please, Sir," said the footman, just then

entering the room, "Mr. Shuttleworth's servant wishes to know if he is to wait for an answer to his master's letter?"

"No, sir," replied the Colonel in a sharp tone, "he is not to wait."

"Please, sir," continued the official, "Mr. Grappler, the steward, is waiting in the housekeeper's room to see you."

"I can't see him now—tell him to call to-morrow."

"Please, sir, Mr. Grappler says, he wishes to consult you on very particular business, and hopes you will see him, if only for a moment."

"Show him into my study, then, directly, and tell John to bring my cob to the door in half an hour."

"Well, Grappler," asked the Colonel on entering his sanctum, "what do you want to bother me about this morning? Quick, man! out with it, as I am in a hurry."

"I calls it, Colonel, just as ungentlemanly a proceeding as I ever hear of—a nasty under-handed job, as a real gentleman

would scorn to have a hand in — that's my opinion, Colonel."

"Hang your opinion, sir, what is the job you complain of?"

"Neither more nor less, Colonel, than that this Mr. Shuttleworth has set his agent to work with old farmer Perrin, and has bought Rushmead Farm over our heads, by giving two thousand pounds more than we offered. I picked it all out, bit by bit, of his son last night, at the Fox and Goose, when he was about three parts drunk, by giving him another glass of brandy and water, pretty stiff, Colonel; I mixed it stiff to get all out of him."

"I wish *you* were stiff and buried too, you old fool!" exclaimed the enraged Colonel, "for allowing yourself to be hoodwinked in this manner. I told you, sir, to buy this farm without fail, and offer another thousand, rather than let it fall into other hands."

"I'm not to blame, Colonel, begging your pardon. Mr. Perrin as good as sold me the property at the price you offered; it was

made a bargain of over a glass of brandy and water."

"Hang your brandy and water, sir," again vehemently interposed the Colonel; "you are drinking brandy and water instead of minding your business, sir."

"Begging your pardon, Colonel, I only takes a drop now and then, to facilitate business—just to suck people's brains a little."

"And muddle your own, you confounded old fool," exclaimed the Colonel, now boiling over with rage: "get along with your very particular business; I shall see Perrin myself."

Within half an hour, the Colonel was cantering along the road leading to Rushmead Farm, instead of that leading to Woodborough Park, where, finding old farmer Perrin at work in his fields, he began to upbraid him for his breach of faith.

"Why, you see, Colonel," Mr. Perrin said, "I meant no offence, but Mr. Grappler is a hard-dealing man, and I couldn't get him beyond the five thousand, when Mr. Map-

ping comes along one morning, and offers two thousand more if I'd settle the job at once, as he were a-going from home next week, and shouldn't be back for a month; so he pulls out a roll of bank notes, 'mounting to two hundred pounds, and I signs an agreement to the bargain, and gives him an acknowledgement for the money paid down."

"I wish to know, Mr. Perrin, if you told this fellow I had made you an offer for the farm?"

"Why, 'is, Colonel, I told 'im all about it, and said, I must speak to you first, before I could close the bargain. 'That's nothing to me,' says Mr. Mapping, 'you may take the money or not, but I shan't offer it again,' and he got up to go away, when I thinks to myself, two thousand pounds more would set up John and Thomas in business; so you see, Colonel, I couldn't afford to lose so much money, and I thought you and Mr. Grappler wouldn't come up to the same pint, and that's the long and short of the business."

"And I call it, Mr. Perrin, a very dishonourable piece of business altogether," added the Colonel, as he turned away, and rode towards home, muttering to himself—"a confounded cotton-spinning rascal! and this is the fellow I have patronised and invited to my house. Knightley warned me not to do so, but, like a fool, I would not listen to his advice."

We may suppose the irritable Colonel in no very placable humour on reaching home, when, sitting down in his den, the following laconic epistle was immediately penned to his friend the cotton-spinner.

"Colonel Maxwell presents his compliments to Mr. Shuttleworth, and begs to decline any alliance with his family.

"Morton Grange."

Having finished this consolatory epistle, a violent pull at the bell brought Thomas to the door, to whom he said, "Tell John to ride over directly with that letter to Hardington."

"Is he to wait for an answer, sir?"

"No, sir—not a minute."

Exit Thomas, and the Colonel, seizing his hat, sallied forth to cool his excited brain by a walk over his farm.

Captain Duncombe having dined and slept the previous night at Hardington, and being an early and wide-awake bird, rising betimes in the morning to see that his horse was properly attended to, saw the letter given to the under-groom, with instructions to go to Morton Grange, and wait for an answer. "Hah! hah!" thinks the Captain, "the governor and Jack have kept it pretty snug, but I suspect that's 'the agreeable news,' the old woman said I should be startled with to-day. She seemed quite cock-a-hoop about something last night; but I have been beforehand with you, old lady, and now the mine is sprung which will blow you all to the d—l! The Colonel knows all about Rushmead Farm by this time," and shoving both hands into his pockets, he walked forth into the park, humming the

old tune of "A frog he would a wooing go."

When the bell rang for breakfast, Duncombe took his place at the table in the most cheerful mood, and it added considerably to his high spirits to notice the fidgety state of Papa and Mamma Shuttleworth, as well as the nervous anxiety of his protégé Jack, who, to use the Captain's phraseology, "was quite off his feed," *i.e.* unable to eat his breakfast.

"Why, Jack," exclaimed the Captain, when they were left alone, "you seem uncommonly down in the mouth this morning; what's the matter, old fellow? Have you got the megrims or the fret?"

"I don't feel very peckish, Duncombe, that's all."

"But that is not all, Jack," replied the Captain, "begging your pardon; you have been doing a little bit of business on the sly, and thought I should not find it out; but did you ever catch a weasel asleep, my boy?"

"No, Duncombe, I don't know much about weasels."

"Or ferrets either," added the Captain; "but as I am a ferret and can smell a rat a long way off, I'll tell you what's the matter with you, Master Jack; you are in a deuced funk about the reception of that little billet-doux, sent off to Morton Grange this morning, and instead of keeping me in the dark about it, you would have acted more wisely by consulting your friend on the matter, since two heads are generally considered better than one; and I shall find out all I wish to know, as to this very secret missive of yours, before to-morrow night."

"Well, Duncombe, you need not take offence, for I have not written any letter at all."

"But it was written on your behalf, although penned by your governor."

Alphonso, struck home by this remark, made no reply, neither did any further allusion to the subject escape the Captain, who resolved to maintain his ground at Hardington until the next morning, hoping

by that time, or before, an answer would arrive from the Colonel.

After breakfast the Captain strolled down to the stables, again attended by Alphonso, who now wished his prying friend at the Land's End, which Duncombe perceiving, he added to Alphonso's annoyance by sitting on the corn bin, and leisurely smoking his cigar.

"I say, Duncombe," Alphonso suggested, "we had better go to my den, where you can enjoy a pipe, instead of that cigar."

"This suits me exactly, old fellow," was the reply, as he continued puffing away, kicking the side of the bin with his heels, as an accompaniment to some occasional snatches of an opera air; "smoke my weed and see my horse dressed at the same time just suits me to a T, this wet morning—killing two birds with a stone."

Alphonso was in a fix, fearing to leave his friend alone, in expectation of his cross-questioning the groom, whose return he was so anxiously awaiting.

The Captain had maintained his position about half an hour, seemingly disposed to

hold it for half the day, when his quick ear detecting the tramp of a horse in the yard, he sprang with a violent kick from his heels against the box, which made the horses jump nearly over their stalls, and rushed to the door; so did Alphonso, in double-quick time, shaking all over with agitation.

"Where's the ticket for the governor, Bill?" the Captain asked.

"Haven't got any, Captain; Thomas the footman said there warn't no answer to master's letter."

"Deuced queer," muttered the Captain; "but I say, Bill, was the family at home?"

"Only the Colonel and Mrs. Maxwell, sir; Miss Hedith was a staying over at Woodborough."

Alphonso's face brightened up at these words, and Duncombe's countenance fell.

"Hang it," he thought, "the Colonel takes time to consider, I may be sold at last."

"Well, Duncombe," Alphonso said in a more cheerful tone, when relieved from

present apprehensions, "they say no news is good news, and I take it the Colonel means to consult the young lady before he sends a reply."

"Then that settles your hash, my boy; for although the Colonel might say yes on account of the money, I'll back the young lady to say no on her own account."

"Why do you think so, Duncombe?"

"Just because there's a chap a deal better-looking than Alphonso Shuttleworth, with as good a house as his, and more money than your governor will fork out, of good old family also, and highly connected, who has been paying particular attentions to Miss Maxwell for the last month."

"Oh, you mean Chetwynd, I suppose; but my governor can outbid him."

"Oh, of course, Master Jack, if the young lady thinks more of the money than the man."

It was now the Captain's turn to be fidgety, and to kill time he proposed a game of billiards, at which, being out of temper, he was beaten by his pupil. The luncheon

hour had arrived, and as they were all seated at table, the butler entered, salver in hand, "A letter from Colonel Maxwell, sir."

The Captain kept his eye intently fixed on the face of Mr. Shuttleworth as he hastily broke open the seal, the varying colour and fierce expression of which, on perusing the contents, afforded him incontestable evidence of the failure of his proposal. Without saying a word Mr. Shuttleworth consigned the letter to his pocket, his looks preventing either his wife or son making any inquiry as to its purport.

Duncombe, now thoroughly satisfied as to the result, resumed his usual spirits, helping himself to another glass of wine, and working away at a turkey's leg as if he had not dined for a week. "Hah, hah!" thought he with secret glee, "the cotton market is dull this morning, old Moneybags has got a settler," as his respected host rose from table, quickly followed by the old woman, who had not tasted a morsel of anything since the arrival of the letter.

"Well, Jack," the Captain said, when his

papa and mamma had left the room, "you may as well follow suit, and hear the news; I don't mind being left alone, so stand upon no ceremony with me, old fellow, as I mean to finish off with that cranberry tart before I've done, and then, as I see my room is more agreeable than my company, I shall toddle off home."

"Oh, don't leave yet, Duncombe; I will be back in a few minutes, and I want to see you before you go."

Leaving the Captain with his tart, we will peep into Mr. Shuttleworth's sanctum, where papa is storming about the room and mamma exclaiming, "Well, I never see'd anything half as imperent as that old snappish Colonel's letter; I never would have believed it of him; who would have thought it?—so agreeable and purlite as he has always made himself when we have dined there. Oh dear! oh dear! my poor boy: to be snubbed like that!"

"Well, mother," said Alphonso, entering the room, interrupting her exclamations, "what's it all about? Let's see the letter."

"Oh, my dear boy, such a nasty, spiteful answer from that crabbish old Colonel!"

"But what is it, mother? I want to see it," as she still held it back.

"It's all over, my dear, with Miss Hedith, and so you will see."

"Bill said Miss Maxwell was at Woodborough, mother, so she could have had no hand in it, and I'll serve the Colonel out for this, by running away with Edith to Gretna Green."

"Well, my dear, it is some comfort to know that sweet, pretty angel wasn't concerned in it, and if I were in your place, Alphonso, I would do as you say."

"But what's to be done with the Captain, mother?" for his father had left them together; "he says he shall go home directly after lunch, and if I don't tell him all about it he will blow me all over the hunting field to-morrow."

"Then you must get him to dine here to-night, and I'll ask him to keep it quiet."

On returning to the dining-room, Alphonso found the Captain standing with his

back to the fire, warming himself, and tapping his leg with his riding-whip.

"Now then, Jack, I'm off; any commands for Morton Grange, where I shall call *en route?*"

"No, Duncombe, don't go yet; mother wants you to dine here to-night."

"Can't afford to lose more time now, Jack, as I wish to learn the news."

"What news, Duncombe?"

"Oh," he replied in a careless tone, "whether Miss Maxwell is to become Mrs. Alphonso Shuttleworth; I can pick out all about the matter from Mrs. Maxwell this afternoon, and shall have it ready for Dunkerton's lawn meet to-morrow."

"You won't serve a fellow such a scurvy trick as that, Duncombe, by telling family secrets?"

"You have confided nothing to me, not a scrap, Master Jack, but, *tout au contraire*, kept me quite in the dark, instead of consulting me as a friend. I have no secret of yours in my keeping, or it had been held sacred, and I shall speak therefore of what

I hear from others precisely as I think fit."

"It was father's doing, Duncombe, who would not allow me to speak to you as I wished, and he and mother thought to surprise you this evening with the agreeable news of my being accepted."

"Very prettily intended, no doubt, Jack; but just look me well over once more, and say if you see anything in the physiognomy of Tom Duncombe to warrant your opinion of his being such a confounded flat as to swallow all that trash about the agreeable surprise; so now I shall wish you good morning."

"Stay, Duncombe, a few minutes longer, and you shall see the letters;" and off went Alphonso, now in a precious fright, to obtain them from his mamma, telling her it was his only chance of keeping him quiet.

As usual, the captain was still tapping his leg with his riding-whip when Alphonso, returning, placed the letters in his hand without further remark.

"'Pon my life," he said, when he had

read the proposal, "that governor of yours has a rum notion of doing business in the matrimonial line. By gad, sir, I never read such an off-hand, flippant piece of literature in the shape of a proposal; it is downright insulting. Why, your governor must have been thinking of making a cotton bargain, when he penned that epistle to the Colonel about his only child; and, of course, here follows the answer, short and rough, like a jackass's gallop. Well, I should like to know what other answer you could expect from a gentleman of old family and high connections, like Colonel Maxwell, upon receiving such an offensive proposition, telling him, in plain terms, that his daughter was to be bought for money! But there it is, that governor of yours, although a good sort of man in his way, knows no more of the etiquette and usages of polished society than a hippopotamus."

"Well, but, Duncombe, what's to be done?"

"Nothing that I can see now," was the reply; "you have shut me out from your

counsels until it is too late. Your governor, by his letter, has set the colonel's back up, and there's an end of the affair, at least for the present."

"But, Duncombe, stay and dine, there's a good fellow, and we will talk it over after dinner."

"Well," replied the Captain, "as it seems setting in for a wet afternoon, I may as well change my mind, and go home to-morrow after hunting."

After drinking a larger quantity of wine than usual that evening at dinner, the Captain, with his chum, retired to his private room, to finish off with mulled claret and a grill, whilst discussing which Alphonso amused his companion by declaring his intention of proposing a runaway match to Edith, when they met at Dunkerton's ball; adding, "I know she likes me better than Chetwynd, so I'll have a go at Gretna Green."

"You'll have a go at another place, you conceited fool," thought the Captain, "before you can persuade Edith Maxwell to

take that trip with a snob like yourself;" but he merely said, "Oh, of course, if the young lady is willing, there is nobody to prevent you, except the colonel."

"Ah!" exclaimed Alphonso, highly elated with his new project, "I don't care a rap for him, and now we may as well go to roost."

CHAPTER VIII.

We have little worthy of note to record before the Marquis of Dunkerton's grand annual fête, to which, as before stated, every gentleman's family possessing landed property within the limits of his lordship's hunting country, was invited — except that Edmund was observed to ride much harder than usual, and from Will Lane's bad state of health, consequent upon his fall, he still continued to hunt the hounds with uniform success. In short, with a mind ill at ease like his, the excitement of the chase brought relief to his troubled spirit; he sought it with feverish avidity, as men seek dissipation, or drink wine, to drown for the time distress or cares; and Edmund's love seemed transferred from Lady Agnes to his spotted favourites.

Their first meeting had been very embarrassing on both sides, for Lady Agnes felt now how unkindly she had treated him; but that passed, his usually deferential manner of late was resumed, and Edith Maxwell being again a guest at Woodborough, prevented the unpleasantness of their being left alone. None of his friends, not even Edith Maxwell, knew or suspected Edmund's rejection by Lady Agnes, and thus matters stood until the evening of the Marquis's fête, to which, although sick at heart, and little inclined for gaiety, his reluctant consent had been given to accompany the Earl, Lady Agnes, and Edith.

The Colonel, rendered savage by Mr. Shuttleworth's underhand conduct, as regarded Rushmead Farm, made no secret of the transaction, or his insolence in asking for the hand of his daughter; and Edith, offended at Alphonso's presumption in daring to associate her feelings with his, as well as his father's trickery, felt little hesitation in complying with the Colonel's

mandate to give the whole family the cut direct. Our friend Alphonso, although not very tall in stature, was sufficiently portly to be rather a conspicuous personage even in a crowd, and being himself aware of this fact, it appeared somewhat strange to him that Edith — for he had the assurance still to call her by her Christian name amongst his friends — should not be able to recognise his features, even when standing before her and making his bow. Alphonso knew she was short-sighted, and, as she turned her head at the moment, supposed she did not see him; but believing, from a very romantic novel he had been lately perusing, that young ladies were invariably addicted to act in opposition to their parents' wishes with regard to marriage, being also under the delusion that Edith's sweet smile, with which she always received her friends and acquaintances, had been fraught with a more especial meaning towards himself, he could not dispel the monomaniacal hallucination of her being certainly in love with him; and

while pondering over these things, a well-known voice whispered in his ear: "Have you settled the trip to the north?"

"Hang it, Duncombe," he said, turning sharply round, "don't talk of these things here; you will be overheard."

"No one will guess to what I allude," was the reply; "but I wish to know if the young lady is agreeable?"

"Confound it, Duncombe, I haven't asked her yet; don't bother a fellow so."

There are some men too conceited, and others too obtuse, to see a joke cut at their expense. Alphonso was one of the former, so wrapped up in self-sufficiency and money-made importance as to think no one could be guilty of laughing at him; and he was fully bent on making a proposal to Edith Maxwell of a trip to Gretna Green before he left Dunkerton House.

Some short time after, observing her walking with his friend the Captain, on the conclusion of a quadrille, he seized that opportunity of now fairly presenting himself to her view, by obstructing her

further progress, and saying, "that he hoped to have the honour of dancing with her."

"I must decline that honour," she replied, with a haughty inclination of her head, as she passed on, leaving Alphonso perfectly astounded at this reception from one he had been contemplating as the willing partner of his northern flight. The look and manner of Edith Maxwell could not be mistaken, for although it was foreign to her disposition to take offence lightly, she felt justly indignant at the familiar terms in which her name had been coupled with his in that off-hand proposal penned by his father.

"You are not aware, perhaps," the Captain remarked to his fair partner, "of the loss you have sustained by declining to dance with Mr. Shuttleworth."

"What loss do you mean?" she inquired.

"The loss of a most pleasurable excursion, in a travelling chariot with four horses, as far north as Gretna Green, which

that young gentleman had intended proposing to you this evening."

"You are joking, for Mr. Shuttleworth could scarcely be so very impertinent as to think of such a thing."

"I am quite serious, Miss Maxwell; for, notwithstanding the Colonel's rebuff, Mr. Alphonso persists in his belief of having inspired you with a flame as fervent as his own."

"Really," she said, "this is too ridiculous to be true, unless, poor man, he is of very weak intellect."

"Oh! not in the least; the son and father think themselves as strong in the head as they are in the pocket, and that all things, not excepting young ladies, are to be had for money."

"Then I hope they are now undeceived," as Edmund came up to offer his arm.

"Has it ever struck you, Edith," Edmund asked, "how ridiculous people appear to a looker-on, when hopping about, and jumping up and down, like a set of puppets moved by strings?"

"No," she said, "I have been generally

too much engaged in the performance to notice the absurdity of the exhibition."

"And too fond of dancing," Edmund added, "to give up the amusement, if ever so absurd."

"I believe I like dancing more for the music than anything else."

"Except the company of a gay captain of dragoons."

"Or, I must substitute, an agreeable partner," she said.

"Then," he replied, "the Captain, I suppose, is included in your category of agreeable, gay, and handsome, and the most particularly interesting of all your partners."

"He may be all the former, without the latter," she replied, with a slight blush.

"Edith," he continued, "would you prefer joining in the dance to walking with me through the saloon, as I have had a fatiguing day, and do not feel up to dancing much to-night?"

"Then I think you had better sit down and rest yourself, which I shall be glad to do also, instead of performing puppet."

Having found two vacant chairs in the smaller saloon, which was nearly empty, Edmund addressed his fair companion in a low tone, from which all levity was banished.

"Edith," he said, with a sigh, "I have incurred the displeasure of one whom I have long regarded with the deepest feelings of affection and interest, by offering her advice when I knew it was needed. I will not run the risk of losing your friendship also, by perhaps ill-timed, unpalatable remarks. It is my failing, a natural one, of which I cannot divest myself, to love those I do love intensely, and to endeavour to avert from their heads, with greater eagerness than is consistent with the usages of social life, the evil I believe impending over them. This failing has cost me the favour of Agnes. Yours I cannot afford to forfeit in like manner, for I have regarded you as one of the very few friends I possess, and whose esteem and confidence I value most highly."

"I shall always consider your offering

me advice, when you think I require it," she replied, "as the greatest proof of your friendship."

"Once before, Edith," he continued, "allusion has been made by me to the same subject, and now, since here, remarks have reached my ears, which compel me to warn you against receiving those attentions from Captain Duncombe which have attracted the notice of others. Oh! let me not see you also, like Agnes, blindly courting a fate wretched as hers; for the character of Captain Duncombe is precisely similar to that of Sir Digby Colville—the reverse of all that is noble or virtuous in man."

"Indeed you are mistaken," she replied, "in thinking Captain Duncombe ever has been or ever can be anything more to me than an acquaintance."

"I hope and trust for your sake, Edith, that the case is so, but the world, judging by appearances only, thinks otherwise. You patronise him too much in public for merely a common acquaintance."

"You shall see then, for the future, that I am not indifferent to your well-intended advice;" and the words had scarcely passed her lips, when the Captain made his approach, and with a bow, said, "he believed Miss Maxwell had kindly promised him the honour of another dance."

"You must have mistaken my meaning," she replied; "for what I said was that I could *not promise* you another."

"Am I then so unfortunate as to find you engaged for the whole evening?"

"I can only repeat my first answer," Edith said, rather formally, "that I must decline making any further engagement with you;" upon which the discomfited Captain withdrew.

"Are you engaged, then, for the next dance?" Edmund asked.

"No," she replied, "not for that, although I believe I am for nearly every other; but you see I have not forgotten the advice you gave me at my first ball."

"Will you dance with me then, Edith, the next quadrille, since I have kept you

sitting here quite long enough, listening to my dull remarks?"

"With pleasure, if you do not feel too tired."

They were about rising to leave the saloon, when Sir Digby Colville entered with Lady Agnes leaning on his arm, and, from her downcast looks and blushing face, it was evident that some very interesting conversation was passing between them. Sir Digby appeared also unusually grave, addressing her in a very low tone of voice; and they were both so engrossed with themselves as to have approached within a short distance of Edmund and Edith before either was aware of their proximity, when Lady Agnes, on lifting her eyes and beholding them, started back in affright, and turned instantly round, but not before Edmund had observed her extreme agitation and confusion.

"Alas!" exclaimed he, as they retreated precipitately, "I fear my worst anticipations are realised, that Agnes has accepted that unprincipled man."

"I fear so too," was Edith's reply.

"But could not you, Edith, dissuade her from such folly?"

"No," she replied sadly; "my influence has been unavailing, for, knowing the Earl's and your opinion of Sir Digby Colville, I have said all I could to induce her to refuse his attentions, and we had a serious disagreement on this subject, when she desired I should never mention his name to her again."

"Oh! what a fate will hers be," Edmund said, "if married to a spendthrift, gambler, and libertine! How infatuated women are with these heartless, plausible hypocrites, these men of the world, who talk of love and sentiment, unknown and unfelt by them, as pity by a tiger. And you too, Edith, with your sound sense, and deep feelings of religion, appear to be taken also with a character equally worldly as that needy Irishman."

"Indeed, indeed you are mistaken, Edmund, for nothing would induce me to

accept Captain Duncombe; such a thought never entered into my mind."

"Oh, keep to that resolution, dear Edith," he said earnestly; "and may God grant you a happier lot in marriage than that of your deluded friend. But oh! what a sad blow will this prove to my dear, kind godfather! Come, Edith," he said, abruptly rising, "I must not detain you here —my heart is too heavy now for dancing; —yet come with me, I will soon find you a more cheerful partner."

"Oh no, thank you; my thoughts, like yours, are gloomy also, at the prospect of this grievous disappointment to the poor Earl."

Edmund resumed his seat, for he felt how soothing to his wounded feelings was the gentle sympathy of this sweet girl, who showed by those melting eyes, and lowly modulated voice, how much she pitied his distress; but even to Edith, dearly as he loved her like his own sister, he would not reveal the secret of his heart, and, fearing

she might guess the truth, he turned the conversation into a more pleasant channel.

Whilst thus conversing together, Mrs. Maxwell entered the room, in search of her daughter, exclaiming, "My dear Edith, I wondered what had become of you, not having seen you for the last half hour, and there is Mr. Chetwynd hunting everywhere for you, as you are engaged to him for this quadrille."

"I really beg his pardon, mamma, but I did not think we had been absent so long from the ball room."

"It is all my fault, dear Mrs. Maxwell," Edmund said, "I alone am deserving your reproaches: but having had a hard day's hunting, I have felt in a very lazy humour to-night, and persuaded Edith to indulge me here, instead of dancing with her, where I suppose," he added with a laugh, "from your account of the lapse of time, I may have forgotten all about it, by indulging in a nap."

"Come, come, Edmund," said Mrs. Maxwell cheerfully, "that is not very likely;

you would scarcely treat Edith so unceremoniously; but now let us return to the dancers, for I do not wish her to appear rude to Mr. Chetwynd."

"You are not very angry with me, dear Mrs. Maxwell?" Edmund said, in a pleading tone.

"Not very, Edmund, if you will promise to be a good boy, and not commit the same fault again."

"Until the next time," he added, "that I am so tired as to wish to be lulled to sleep by Edith's sweet musical voice."

"So you think, Edmund, by singing Edith's praises, to avoid my displeasure.

"Well, but dear Mrs. Maxwell, has she not a soft, sweet, silvery voice, like your own?"

"I will hear no flattery from you, Edmund; anything but that I can forgive; but, come, we really must return to the ball-room, for the Colonel is very irate, having been searching for Edith in vain; and here he comes, looking in a very irritable mood."

"Where have you been, Edith?" he asked in a sharp tone. "I have been pacing through nearly every room on the ground-floor in search of you."

"Only here, dear Papa," Edith answered.

"It is not proper for young ladies to be sitting with gentlemen in a room by themselves, it causes remarks to be made, which are not pleasant to a father's ears."

"We were not alone, dear Papa, this room is open to the company."

"My dear Colonel," interposed Edmund, "pray spare poor Edith reproaches of which she is wholly undeserving; it was my fault, if fault it is, in detaining her, contrary, I believe, to her own inclination, because I felt too tired by my day's exertions, or too lazy, if you will, to dance. Punish me as you please, I care not how severely, but pray spare the innocent."

A look from Mrs. Maxwell turned her lord's wrath in a moment.

"Well, well, Edmund," he replied, "we won't say any more about it; but having heard remarks to-night, and some very

severe, too, on the flirtation of Lady Agnes, I did not like the idea of similar ones being made on Edith."

"Of that, my dear Sir, you need not entertain the most remote apprehension, and I hope you will believe me as jealous of Edith's fair name as yourself."

"Yes, yes, Edmund, I do believe you; but I am rather out of temper to-night, by meeting that confounded cotton fellow here, whom I, of course, cut dead at once."

"I have felt my hand itch to horsewhip him, and his son too, ever since you told me of their conduct."

"Very bad; very dishonourable indeed, Edmund; but you must not quarrel with either on my account."

Fortunately for Edith a valse intervened, which saved her from appearing oblivious of her engagement to Mr. Chetwynd, upon whose approach Edmund sauntered through the crowd, and took up a position from which he could see the dancers; and his eyes were directed to-

wards Edith and her partner with a closer scrutiny than he had ever regarded her with before. Whilst loving, and believing himself beloved by Lady Agnes, Edmund had not felt so deep an interest in her as to watch her movements and behaviour when dancing or conversing with other men. How was it that he found himself thus engaged now? It would be absurd to suppose him in love with Edith also; but, if asked by his dearest friend the true nature of his feelings towards her at that moment, a definition of them would have been impossible to himself.

When rejected by Lady Agnes, he felt desolate, dejected, and alone; his sister being the only friend to whom he dare confess the true feelings of his heart. Her sympathy had soothed him into something like resignation; he loved her more than ever for that sweet counsel she had given; for those soothing words she had spoken to calm his troubled breast. Again had that breast been pierced by another dart, when beholding Lady Agnes bestowing her affec-

tions on one whose name and character he detested. It was then, while smarting from this fresh wound, that Edith Maxwell's sympathy, expressed more by looks than words, fell like the gentle dew upon parched ground, lulling his agonised feelings to rest. To her he had made no confession; of her he had asked no sympathy; he had never trusted her as a friend, yet had she shown a deeper interest in his happiness — for to her it was clear the cause of his depression was surmised, if not known — than he could have expected from any but his own sister. A feeling of deep gratitude sprung up forthwith in his heart towards this dear gentle girl, and from that hour he resolved to watch over her with a brother's love, and a brother's jealous care. A new feeling towards her had now arisen; a new channel opened, into which his troubled thoughts might be diverted; there was one other being whom he could, and felt he must now love, as one sent to comfort him from a brighter sphere.

Whilst these thoughts occupied him,

Major Townshend, whose nose, like that of Paul Pry, was ever poking and peering into odd corners, and little by-nooks, whispered in his ear, "All settled, I see, Knightley; give you joy; you have made the best bargain of the two, by gad!"

"I don't understand you, Townshend; what do you mean?"

"Well, just come with me into the supper room, and I will explain. Now," said the Major, helping himself to a glass of wine, "you know I am not a dancing man, so to pass the time, I just took a survey of the apartments, and on passing into the Marchioness's boudoir, by gad, Sir, there I saw that long-legged Irish baronet, kissing the hand of Lady Agnes, up in the far corner."

"Nonsense, Townshend, your eyes must have deceived you."

"But my ears did not, Knightley, for by gad, Sir, I heard the smack; and if you had seen them when I coughed, by gad, Sir, they sprang up as if a powder-flask had burst at their feet. Well then, on peering into another room, I saw Edmund

Knightley sitting with Edith Maxwell, and from his looks and manner, I jumped to the conclusion, that he had been doing pretty nearly, if not quite, the same thing; so I think, my boy, you have got the best of the two, although I did hear you were cut out for the Peer's daughter."

"You are greatly deceived, Townshend, in supposing me making love to Miss Maxwell. I have never dreamt of proposing for her."

"Then, by gad, Knightley, begging your pardon, you are a bigger fool than I gave you credit for; why, hang it, Sir, a young fellow like you *must* be in love with some girl, and if not with Edith Maxwell or Lady Agnes, who is now bespoke, by gad, Sir, I should like to know with whom you are in love?"

"Well, Townshend, suppose I don't choose to enlighten you on this very interesting subject?"

"Then I shall just draw my own conclusion—and, by gad, Sir, I'll bet you a cool hundred that you marry or are engaged to

Edith Maxwell before the opening day of next hunting season."

"You know I am not a betting man, and never risked more than a shilling upon any event in my life; but I give you my word, that as regards myself your conjectures are wholly unfounded, and, for the young lady's sake, I trust you will not express these chimerical opinions to other men."

"No, Knightley, I promise you I will not, although entertaining myself a very strong impression that there is love on one side, if not on both. And now, as Mrs. Major is impatient to return to her brats, I must say good night."

CHAPTER IX.

THE Major was gone. Edmund Knightley stood alone in that long, lofty room. A new light had burst suddenly in upon his mind, from Major Townshend's words. He became abstracted and thoughtful, and advancing to the fire-place sat down in an easy chair, where, removed from view by a large screen, he could meditate for a while undisturbed.

"It may be," he thought, "as the Major says—it may be possible that Edith does regard me with warmer feelings than those of friendship—what then? I have no such love to offer in return; I can never love again; there is a void, a vacancy in my heart, which none other can fill—it is cold, too cold now to be warmed again by

woman's smile. No Edith, I trust you do not thus regard one who can make you no return. May you never feel what I have felt these last few weeks! May your first young hopes of joy and love never be withered in the bud like mine! May you never know that utter desolation of hope —that listless despondency of mind, which follows unrequited affection! But where could Edith love, and not be loved in return? and yet"—

The current of his thoughts was here interrupted by the approach of footsteps, to within a few feet of his position, and the well-known voice of Chetwynd struck his ear, who, after presenting an ice to his companion, said in a low tone, though every word seemed conveyed through the screen as a sounding board to his now excited attention—

"Dear Miss Maxwell, we are now alone, perhaps for a few brief moments only—but these are to me precious ones, long and eagerly sought, when I might lay open the feelings of my heart, whose every pulse

since our first introduction has beaten for you alone."

"Mr. Chetwynd," interrupted Edith, in a gentle though firm voice, "I cannot listen to such language from you—pray spare me saying more."

"Oh! Edith, Edith! let me not appeal to that gentle heart in vain. Oh! could you know the deep abiding love, the respectful admiration, with which I have so long regarded you, you could not—would not, I feel, consign me to hopeless misery. Let me still live in hope that you may yet be propitious to my suit. I may have been too hasty in this early declaration of my sentiments—you may look upon me as nearly a stranger from our short acquaintance—but oh! do not reject my suit until you know me better—until time shall prove the stedfast, unwavering love I feel for you."

"Pray cease, Mr. Chetwynd," Edith said, having made fruitless efforts to check his impassioned address, "spare me the pain of hearing more," and the expression of her

features showed how painful her feelings were.

"I see you feel for me," he continued, "your gentle nature revolts at the misery your words inflict. Oh! dearest Edith, give way to those gentle feelings of your heart; on my knees, I implore—entreat you—do not pronounce my doom;" and seizing her hand, he threw himself on one knee before her.

"Rise, Mr. Chetwynd," she said, "I cannot allow you to indulge the thought that time will effect any alteration in my present sentiments towards you; pray release my hand."

"Edith," he continued, rising and letting her hand fall, "is it, then, as I fear, that you love another?"

Edmund listened eagerly—intensely—painfully for her reply. For a second or two, which seemed an hour of suspense to his excited mind, none was returned. "Hah!" he thought, "she does then love another!" when her voice after this slight pause was again heard, but now in an offended tone.

"Mr. Chetwynd will excuse me for saying he has no right to question my motives for declining his addresses, and I must beg instantly to return to the ball-room;" with which she turned away from the table towards the door, followed by Mr. Chetwynd, who said, "I beg your pardon, Miss Maxwell, if I have by any word of mine given you offence, but pray allow me to hope you will still regard me as a friend?"

To this there was no reply.

As they quitted the room, Edmund breathed more freely. His situation had been most painful—most distressing to an honourable mind. He had listened to a confession intended for Edith's ear only. But anxiety to know the secret of her heart had kept him silent—motionless—almost breathless in his chair. At first he thought of rising and poking the fire to warn Chetwynd of his presence, or of feigning sleep and snoring, but ardent curiosity prevailed.

"Will my fate be his also?" he asked himself. "Can Edith resist such earnestness of manner—such a deep, fervent ap-

peal as his? No," he thought, "her gentle heart will melt on beholding his lowly position—his deep devotion. She will pity his feelings, and spare him even at the sacrifice of her own."

Such were the thoughts which passed rapidly and tumultuously through Edmund's mind as he listened to Chetwynd. He was astonished at her firm refusal of his suit, and her indignant manner when questioned as to her love for another. Who could that other be? Was it Duncombe or Reginald upon whom her first young affections had been bestowed?

Edmund was now turning from the room, and as he passed the place where Edith had been standing at the table, a little *vinaigrette*, in the shape of a heart, caught his eye, which, in her confusion having been left there, was instantly transferred to his pocket, and on reaching the ball-room he found the Earl, with Lady Agnes, Edith, and Mrs. Errington, waiting only for him to return home.

After a late breakfast the next morning,

Lady Agnes excusing herself from appearing by being over-fatigued, Edmund said, "Edith, will you take a walk with me this fine day, it will restore the colour to your cheeks."

"Most willingly," she replied.

"Then I will be ready to escort you in half an hour, as I have two letters to write, and you will find me in the library."

At the time appointed, Edith made her appearance with a pretty new bonnet on, which became her exceedingly, and Edmund, lifting his eyes to her face, seemed for the first time struck with her surpassing loveliness.

"Will you put these letters for me in the letter-box in the hall," he asked, "while I fetch my hat?"

In a few minutes after they were walking in the pleasure-grounds, when Edmund said, "So, Edith, you lost your heart last night at the ball?"

"No, indeed I did not," she replied, with a deep blush, as she thought of Chetwynd's proposal.

"Excuse me, Edith, for contradicting ou, but although not perhaps aware of the

loss, you did certainly leave your heart behind you, and it was my good fortune to find it—see, here it is," producing the *vinaigrette.*

"Oh, yes," she said, "I remember now—I did leave it there, but where I could not tell."

"I found it lying on the supper-table," which caused the colour again to rush even to her forehead, "but I shall prize this little heart of yours dearly, if you will allow me to keep it."

"It is yours, Edmund, if you think such a trifle worth your acceptance."

"It is no trifling gift to me, dear Edith, and I shall ever value it most highly for your sake. Will you be here the day after to-morrow?" he asked, as they walked on, "for I must return to Wychwood this afternoon, and to-morrow being my hunting day, I shall remain there also that night."

"I fear mamma will be anxious for me to return home, although Agnes has begged me to remain with her a little longer."

"To help her to bear the storm which I

fear is gathering," said Edmund, mournfully; "for I was told last night she had accepted that confounded baronet."

"Indeed, Edmund! I hope not, for the Earl has taken a great dislike to him; but Agnes has made no allusion to the subject, having scarcely mentioned his name."

"If what Townshend told me he saw last night be true," Edmund said, "we shall soon hear more about this unfortunate affair; and for the Earl's sake, dear Edith, let me beg you to remain at Woodborough a few days longer; but neither to him, Agnes, nor Mrs. Errington, must you give intimation of what I have now told you."

"That you need not fear," she replied, "and I will endeavour to persuade mamma when she calls to extend my visit."

The next afternoon, when her mother called, Edith petitioned to remain a few days longer at Woodborough, upon which Mrs. Maxwell said—"Well, my love, as I fear there will be some dreadful work between the poor Earl and Lady Agnes, when he hears what I heard the other night,

that she has accepted Sir Digby Colville, you can remain here another week, where your presence may be of some use to your kind old friend."

That same afternoon, whilst Edmund was out hunting, and Mrs. Maxwell had scarcely passed through the lodge gates of Woodborough Park, Sir Digby Colville called, and asking if the Earl was at home, was shown into the library, where, after a few preliminary remarks on the common topics of the day, he began breaking the object of his visit in the most courteous and deferential language — extolling the beauty and charms of Lady Agnes to the skies, and avowing the very deep impression she had made upon his heart.

When in the midst of this most enraptured harangue, the Earl's impatience could no longer be restrained, who said—

"I must decline, Sir, listening to anything more on this subject, for I cannot possibly countenance your addresses to my daughter."

"May I beg, my Lord, to be informed on what grounds? since I am quite willing

that all necessary inquiries respecting my connections, fortune and position should be made by your Lordship, which I feel assured will prove quite satisfactory."

"I have neither the wish nor the intention of making any such inquiries, Sir Digby Colville, because they are wholly uninteresting to me."

"My Lord, I am already assured that Lady Agnes reciprocates my sentiments, and I trust, therefore, your Lordship will not thus summarily dismiss my suit."

"If, Sir," continued the Earl, rising, "you have already attempted to win my daughter's affections without consulting her father, that fact, Sir, alone, is sufficient for me to decline at once the honour you purposed conferring on my family, by your contemplated union with my only child; and I must refuse hearing another word on this most painful subject."

Sir Digby Colville, perceiving by the Earl's excited manner that further pleading at that time would only increase his irritation, prudently withdrew, after ex-

pressing his deep sorrow for the premature disclosure he had made of his affection for Lady Agnes, which he hoped the Earl would pardon, on account of the overwhelming feelings with which her beauty had inspired him. Not another word, however, could be elicited from the indignant father, who sternly bowed him out of the room.

When his agitation had somewhat subsided, the Earl, returning to the drawing-room, found it tenanted only by Mrs. Errington, Lady Agnes having fled precipitately upon seeing Sir Digby riding up to the hall door.

"I fear, my dear Lord," Mrs. Errington said, observing his perturbed looks, "you have had an unpleasant visitor."

"Yes, indeed I have, and dread from what he admitted that my infatuated child has already accepted this Irish speculator without consulting me."

"I suspect, my dear Lord, something of the kind has occurred, from the altered demeanour of Lady Agnes since the fête at

Dunkerton House, coupled with the remarks which reached me, of her great flirtation with Sir Digby Colville that evening."

"Then, my dear Mrs. Errington, may I beg you to inform my daughter that I wish to speak with her immediately in my morning room."

On this message being delivered, Lady Agnes became excessively agitated, in anticipation of a severe lecture, if not more, from her father, whose just displeasure she felt conscious of having deserved.

"Oh! dear Mrs. Errington," she exclaimed, "I fear I have done wrong in accepting Sir Digby Colville; but indeed, indeed, I have become so deeply attached to him that life would be insupportable to me without him."

"You have been frequently warned by me, dear Agnes, not to encourage the attentions of this gentleman, of whom your father has heard very unfavourable accounts, so much so that I have told you his objection to him will never be overcome. As your best friend, therefore, I advise you to

give up all thoughts of ever marrying this Sir Digby Colville."

"Oh! that I cannot—will not do," she exclaimed passionately, "I would rather die than give him up!"

"Well, my dear, I can say no more than I have already on this most distressing subject. The Earl is waiting to see you in his own room, and my last words are, be careful not to offend your father further, who has already spoilt you by too much indulgence, for on this point he seems very determined."

"So am I," *thought* the petulant beauty, as she descended the staircase.

Upon entering her father's room, she cast a timid glance at his face, and was struck by the sad and solemn expression of his features, as he desired her to take a chair.

"I have sent for you," he said, "to speak on a very serious matter—most serious it is to you, as concerning your future happiness, both in this world and that which is to come. I have warned you several times

against accepting the attentions of Sir Digby Colville, but notwithstanding, I have been grieved—most deeply grieved—to find that so far from my advice and warning being heeded, you have positively accepted that man for your guide and protector through life, and would leave your too-indulgent and fond father to mourn alone the misery which, by such a rash step, you would entail upon me in my declining years."

"Oh! no, no, my dearest father—I would not leave you for all the world. Sir Digby has promised that I shall remain with you, at least half the year, if not longer, if I wish; that in this respect, as in all others, my wishes shall be his guide."

"Oh! no doubt," replied the Earl, with a bitter sneer, "this arrangement would be most agreeable to a man of his broken fortunes."

"Oh, no, papa—you are greatly mistaken and deceived as to his fortune; he has a very fine place in Ireland."

"Which of course," added the Earl, con-

temptuously, "every Irish gentleman has, mortgaged up to the lawn on which it stands; but as to income or money to support a wife, he has not sufficient to maintain himself, without horse-dealing and gambling! I have heard all concerning him—he has been for four or five years what is called a man about town—in other words, one who has been attending all fashionable assemblies there, in the hope of marrying a woman of fortune, to retrieve his lost estates and support his extravagance—but having failed to find any woman there silly enough to become his wife, he has now come down here in search of an heiress, and you, Lady Agnes, are the victim he has selected—the deceived, wretched dupe of this man's false pretensions and deep machinations. You are young, artless, and unsuspecting, and like a foolish girl, taken with the handsome person and plausible manners of this cunning man of the world. *I* am not so deceived, and to save you, my child, from misery, degradation, and want, I have posi-

tively refused Sir Digby Colville's proposal for your hand."

"Oh papa," she said, imploringly, "you are, indeed, misinformed as to his true character — he is most amiable — most kind-hearted — and surely it is sufficient that he is Lord Dunkerton's most intimate friend. Can you suppose the Marchioness would permit such a person as he has been represented to you, to remain a guest in her house for more than three months?"

"The Marchioness has no voice in the matter," the Earl replied, "and his being Lord Dunkerton's most intimate friend is no recommendation to me. Once more, Lady Agnes, I repeat that this Irish baronet shall never, with my consent, become your husband; and I insist upon your never holding any further communication with him."

The Earl rose indignantly from his chair, and approached the fire-place — but when he again turned his head, Lady Agnes was gone. Rushing to her own room, she

locked the door, and gave way to an uncontrolled burst of passionate tears — inveighing bitterly against her father's cruelty to herself, and unjust reflections upon her lover.

CHAPTER X.

Upon Edith's gaining admittance — not without considerable trouble — to her room half an hour after, she found Lady Agnes still indulging her grief, and refusing to be comforted.

"Oh! Edith," she exclaimed, "you have never known what it is to love—and love with all the intensity of a first affection, or you would not mock my misery by advising me to give up all thoughts of marrying Sir Digby Colville."

"I give you, dear Agnes, the advice I should myself follow, not to marry, in direct disobedience to my father's wishes, any one, however estimable—however deserving of my affection. Of Sir Digby Colville's character and disposition you know nothing, all that you can know of him is what I

know also, that he is handsome, agreeable, and of highly-polished manners; but upon such a very slender, superficial foundation as this, no girl with common reflection could expect any reasonable hopes of happiness for life. I have always given you my candid opinion of him since his first introduction to us; and I am sorry to say, dear Agnes, that opinion has been more confirmed every time we have since met."

"Oh! you are so prudish and particular, Edith, in your ideas of men, that you will never find one to realise such Utopian expectations—unless it be Edmund, whom I should think just the person to suit you—so amiable—so strict—so full of sentimentality and morality, that he is fit to become, as he is called, the Abbot of St. Austins."

"If I ever do marry, Agnes, it will be one whom I can respect as well as love for his virtues, not fear for his vices; but as we shall never agree upon these points, it is useless my saying more—yet pray do not increase the Earl's displeasure by refusing to appear at dinner."

"You must excuse me, Edith, but after papa's cruel conduct and severe reflections upon Sir Digby Colville, I shall remain in my own room—you can say, what is the truth, that I have a severe head-ache, and no wish for anything more than a cup of tea."

"Well, my dear Agnes, I have no doubt this must be the case, and I will come up and sit with you as soon as we leave the dining-room."

It is needless relating more of the pettishness and insubordination exhibited by Lady Agnes that evening and the following morning. Rejecting all counsel from Mrs. Errington and Edith, she continued to indulge her ill-humour and stedfast determination not to marry any other person than Sir Digby.

The next day, when Edmund arrived at Woodborough, he was informed by the Earl of all that had occurred, and his fixed resolution never to accept Sir Digby Colville as a son-in-law, adding, that he felt not only surprised but exceedingly

indignant at Lord Dunkerton's entertaining such a person in his house for so long a time, and abetting him in his attempt to deprive him of his only child.

"I must confess, my dear Uncle, an absence of all surprise at the conduct of Lord Dunkerton, whose character will bear perhaps as little investigation as that of his friend, for you know the very trite old saying—'Birds of a feather flock together.' Dunkerton is not overburdened with morality, although for appearance' sake professing to observe certain conventional rules of society; but what can you expect from a confirmed racing and betting man, as well as gambler? He has already lowered himself, in the opinion of all honourable men, by inviting black-legs to his house, and treating such persons as his familiar friends, so that they even talk as lightly of him as one of their own class—and the poor Marchioness mourns and laments in silence her husband's depravity, without daring to utter a word of remonstrance—for Dunkerton has a fearful temper;—in

short, since his connection with these black-legs and blackguards he has lost all respect, even for himself.

"I was not aware of these things, Edmund," the Earl replied, "or should not have been present at his ball."

"It would be hard, Uncle, to punish poor Emily for the sins of her husband, and on her account, many visit there who would not otherwise be seen at Dunkerton House."

"Then, my dear Edmund, it is the more incumbent on me strenuously to resist, as I have already, any further overtures from this Irish baronet, and save my child from a more wretched fate than that of the Marchioness."

"There can be little doubt, I fear, dear Uncle, as to the ultimate result, should Agnes persist in marrying this man; but the question is, how it can be avoided — for if treated with too much severity, I fear from her haughty disposition she will break out into open rebellion; and she may possibly by you, and by you only, be led — although I am quite sure she will never be

driven to act contrary to her own inclination. I would of course, my dear Uncle, do anything in my power to dissuade her from this false step; but you know my influence is entirely gone, and she now regards me with suspicion, if not aversion."

"Ah! Edmund! it is a sad, sad return I have experienced from this wayward, undutiful girl; but Mrs. Errington has often warned me that she would be spoilt by my too great and culpable indulgence—she has never been refused or checked in anything"—

"You, my dear Uncle," added Edmund, "have allowed her to have her own way so long, I fear she will have it still."

"Have you no interest with your friend," Edmund asked, when he and Edith were alone in the afternoon, "to dissuade her from the contemplation of such a wretched connection?"

"No," Edith replied, "I fear none—neither has Mrs. Errington, to whom she expressed her determination, if obliged to wait by her father so long, to marry Sir

Digby when she became of age—but that nothing should induce her to give him up. This Mrs. Errington dare not tell the Earl —neither must you, Edmund, for it would only increase his unhappiness."

"You do not think then, Edith, she will run away with this fortune-hunter?"

"I really cannot say, Edmund, although I believe she is so infatuated as to do almost anything he might suggest, if treated here with too great severity."

"Would you act thus, in disobedience to your father's wishes, Edith, were you attached to a person he did not approve?"

"No," she replied, "how can you suppose I would."

"Well, no, I did not suppose you would —but should the Colonel press you to marry any one you did not love?"

"I do not think Papa would be so unkind."

"Well, but suppose he were to do so— for he is very peremptory sometimes?"

"As I would not act in opposition to his wishes, neither would I marry any person in opposition to my own."

"Well, Edith, I think this stipulation is most fair and reasonable, and I trust for your own sake you will maintain this very prudent and proper resolution—for marriage is indeed a most serious obligation, and seldom viewed by young girls in its really solemn light. Parents, also, think too much of worldly things to consider sufficiently their children's true interest, in seeing them *well* married, instead of being richly married."

Lady Agnes, continuing to indulge her ill-humour, did not choose to appear at the dinner table that evening, which passed heavily away, unenlivened even by a note of music. The week had now expired, when Edith was to leave Woodborough, which she could now do without reluctance, all her efforts to induce Lady Agnes to alter her behaviour towards her father having proved unavailing—in fact, her patience had become exhausted by the persevering pettishness of this self-willed girl, with whom she now felt little community of feeling. As a last attempt, however, to

divert her mind from dwelling so entirely upon this subject, she endeavoured to persuade her to spend a few days at Morton Grange, and this invitation being also declined very positively, Edith returned home.

During her absence, Mr. Chetwynd had called upon the Colonel, renewing his proposal formally to her father, whose consent was readily obtained to favour his suit; for Chetwynd, having discovered his reluctance to part with money during his lifetime, had entered fully into the business part of the matter, offering to make a very handsome settlement upon Edith, without requiring anything in return.

"You see, Chetwynd," the Colonel remarked on his first broaching the subject, "I have not the slightest objection to yourself, but just the reverse—yet Edith is my only child, and I shall indeed feel, as will Mrs. Maxwell also, quite lonely without her—in short, I do not wish her to marry for a year at least. Moreover, my income is chiefly derived from land, except a few loose thousands in the funds, which it

would be ruinous work to sell out at present prices—and as a friend and neighbour I may tell you, that I intended investing all my spare cash in the purchase of a few fields here and there interspersed with my property, to render it more complete, so that at my death Edith will reap the benefit—since all I possess will of course go to her and her husband, if she selects one I approve."

"You have quite mistaken me, my dear Sir," Chetwynd replied, "if you suppose my proposal for your daughter's hand influenced in the slightest degree by mercenary motives—for not one shilling of the money would I deprive you of that you proposed investing in the improvement of your estates. I have enough—and more than enough already; so that I propose settling on your daughter five hundred a year as pin-money, to be at her own disposal, and two thousand a year in the event of my decease. The rental of my other estates, exceeding ten thousand a year, would provide for any children of the marriage.

"Very handsome indeed, Chetwynd—nothing can be more liberal; but as to pin-money, I shall of course make Edith a sufficient allowance to render her in that respect totally independent of her husband."

"Then, may I hope, my dear Sir, Mrs. Maxwell and yourself will use your influence to further my hopes of happiness with your most lovely and amiable daughter, to obtain whose hand I would cheerfully resign all I have in the world—in fact, my dear Sir, she has inspired me with a passion so fervent and devoted that I feel I cannot exist without her."

"Well, well, Chetwynd, this sounds very romantic, but knowing you to be of a sanguine temperament, I dare say you feel what you express—although men at your time of life don't often die for love."

"I have never, Colonel, really known what love was, until bewitched, as I most certainly am now,—fascinated—enraptured by the irresistible charms of Miss Maxwell."

"Well, well, Chetwynd, but we really do not wish to part with her yet, as she is very

young, and has seen nothing of the world —I cannot go further than by saying, we thoroughly approve and shall be happy to sanction your addresses, although we do not wish her to enter into any positive engagement just at present."

"I thank you, dear Sir, for your good wishes, most heartily and gratefully—but I should have told you that I did venture, at Dunkerton's ball, to express my sentiments to Miss Maxwell rather warmly, by which she appeared so taken by surprise, that I requested she would consider and reserve her final answer until we met again."

"Very well, Chetwynd, after what you have now told me, I should advise you to defer re-opening the subject for some time, and continue your visits as before, in your previous character of a friend."

"Yes, my dear Colonel, perhaps it will be best for me to adopt your suggestions—afterwards, when supported by yourself and Mrs. Maxwell, I have every reason to hope for success."

CHAPTER XI.

MANY hours had not elapsed before Alphonso's bad luck in his wooing was communicated to the Marquis, by his esteemed friend Duncombe, in a manner so confidential that it had, within a brief space of time, become public property; that is, everybody knew everything about it, and a great deal more than had actually occurred; the story, snow ball-fashion, having gained considerably in its rolling progress, so that our poor hero had been represented as kicked out of Morton Grange by the peppery old Colonel, for daring to aspire to his daughter's hand. There is a very trite, though true old aphorism, "Save me from my friends;" and it must be confessed that Alphonso's particular chum, enraged by

his presuming to act for himself, set the ball a-going with a very malicious kick.

The Captain, whose inventive faculties were generally on the stretch to assist others as well as himself, volunteered a little private suggestion to the Marquis on this event.

"What think you, Dunkerton," he asked, "of this soft young gentleman for your cousin Lady Gertrude? He will be just in the humour now to catch at a pretty bird like her."

"Well, Duncombe, it is not a bad idea; but her little ladyship is as proud as a peacock, and will never put up with the old lady bear as a mamma-in-law."

"Oh! confound the old woman," exclaimed the Captain, "she can be muzzled or strangled, or something of the kind; of course she would never think of living with her; but the cub is not so much amiss, and may be licked into something bearable; and the Governor, as he is called, will pass muster well enough."

"That cotton fellow is a shrewd, sharp-

witted man of business, Duncombe, and if he lets me into a secret as to these railway shares I will patronise him; but the Marchioness won't stand that *has*pirating old woman."

"For which I cannot blame her, my Lord, but you can invite the papa and son to a dog party, and that sort of thing, without that piece of vulgarity being included."

In somewhat less than ten days after this conversation had taken place, Lady Gertrude Lennard made her appearance at Dunkerton House, and the day after her arrival the Captain and his victim were asked to dine there, after hunting with the Marquis.

Lady Gertrude, as to stature, might be about two inches above the standard of a pocket Venus; of fair and almost transparent complexion, and light auburn hair. She was now in her twenty-sixth year, having seen several London seasons; and being the eldest of a family of three sons and four other daughters, her mother, the

Countess of B——, began to entertain certain misgivings as to her adopting any other name, and thereby making way for her younger sisters, two of whom had already made their *debût* in fashionable life; and it must be confessed, Lady Gertrude herself began to feel rather solicitous about changing her state, and possessing a home she could call her own, provided it contained the necessary comforts and luxuries, to which she had been accustomed.

To say that at first sight the appearance of our hero comported in the least degree with her preconceived ideas of what a husband ought to be, would be absurd. She had moved too much amongst polished men of the higher orders, not to be struck immediately with the contrast; but having youth and tolerably good looks in his favour, she thought he might be made, with a good deal of drilling, presentable after a time to her aristocratic acquaintance. He seemed soft and plastic enough to be moulded into something passable, so that, if she could make up her mind to marry him, she had every

reason to think he would become a very obliging and obedient husband.

Alphonso, on the other hand, felt not only flattered, but exceedingly pleased, with her animated and agreeable conversation, during the dinner hour, when he sat next to her; the little heightened colour, which occasionally visited her cheeks, with a very bewitching smile, rendering her most interesting in his eyes, and he never felt so much at home with any young lady before. Lady Gertrude chatted away as if she had known him for two years, instead of two hours; in short, to use his own expression, "she did all the talking for him." He never could get on with Edith Maxwell; she was not a talkative young lady; and although her smile seemed to invite, her reserve repelled him. Alphonso began to think he had committed a great mistake by fancying himself in love with her. She was not, he thought now, at all the person to have suited him.

How fortunate it is, for some people, they can be so easily satisfied, that the

grapes which they cannot reach must be very sour! But Alphonso might be supposed still smarting from the effects of Cupid's darts, yet in reality there existed no such feeling as pure love within his heart; he had never experienced what true love was, and the Captain very naïvely remarked, "that he hadn't got it in him." There was not the most infinitesimal part of it to be detected by the most accurate analysis, in the whole composition of his frame, physical, spiritual, or mental. The material of which our hero was composed, resembled a bale of cotton, not gun cotton, for there was not a particle of explosive matter belonging to him. His passions even moved slowly and sluggishly, like a deep sulky stream, with a heavy muddy bottom.

The character of Alphonso is not an over-coloured picture; it is true to life. I have known more than one original Alphonso, who never have loved, and never could love anybody but themselves, from boyhood to manhood, and from manhood to old age; disinterested affection has been

a stranger to their hearts. They have married, some more than once, and would have married half a dozen wives if they could, yet have they never experienced what true love is. Alphonso was nettled —a term very expressive of his mental feelings, as compared with that bodily irritation experienced from the sting of that weed or plant, the bite of which most men have had cause to remember — by the treatment he had received from the Colonel and by his daughter's haughtiness at the ball, the cause of which yet remained *in ambiguo.*

He and his father had been received and *fêted* at Dunkerton House, and here he was now, sitting beside Lady Gertrude Lennard, who, if not so handsome as Edith Maxwell, yet appeared nearly as fascinating, more agreeable, quite as good-tempered, and, what was of immense consequence in his sight, a lady in her own right. "Ah," he thought, "if I could persuade her to become Lady Gertrude Shuttleworth, that would be a go indeed. To be cousin to the Marquis of Dunkerton! my lucky stars!" reasoned

Alphonso, "what a go that would be; going right a-head of the fussy old Colonel, and all the country squires in Huntingshire!"

The close of the hunting season had now arrived. It is the last lawn meet with the Marquis of Dunkerton's fox-hounds. A grand breakfast has been prepared, to which all are welcome, yet of which few partake. At eleven o'clock the lawn in front of the house presents a most animated spectacle. There are at least five hundred horsemen there assembled in every variety of costume. The pink coats of the Knightley hunt contrasted favourably with the more sombre, yet more coveted dark green livery of the Marquis. Beyond this concourse of equestrians, is a half circle or outer ring formed by carriages of all descriptions, drawn up as on a race-course, containing the female portion of the neighbouring gentlemen's families; the wives and daughters of the principal tradesmen from the fashionable town of Waterton, who patronise the Marquis's hunt, are also there, to see and be seen. Every man and boy

living within a radius of ten miles, who can muster horse or pony, adds his quota to the cavalcade.

On the outside of this group, between the ring formed by carriages and horsemen, a space is left for the hounds and their attendants to parade up and down for the gratification of the ladies, until the Marquis makes his appearance on the lawn. On the gravel drive in front of the house, with a few others containing particular friends, stands the carriage of the Marchioness, now, as the clock strikes twelve, occupied by herself and Lady Gertrude Lennard; at one side our friend Alphonso is stationed, on his favourite hunter Mameluke, attempting to say some pretty things to the fair Gertrude, who, being mischievously disposed that morning, and observing Mameluke's dread of her parasol, gave it an occasional twirl, thereby occasioning Mameluke to make sundry sudden retrograde movements, greatly to the discomfiture of Alphonso (who was twice all but unhorsed), and the extreme delight of her little ladyship, who

enjoyed the fun so much that she was obliged to lower her parasol, to prevent her admirer observing her exceeding merriment at his expense. Having, however, tormented him in this manner for some twenty minutes, the offensive flag was dropped for a time, to admit of his nearer approach.

"Your horse seems very nervous, Mr. Shuttleworth," she remarked, with the most provoking *nonchalance*.

"It is your parasol which frightens him, Lady Gertrude, and I wish to goodness you would put it down for a few minutes."

"Well, I can oblige you thus much, until the sun again breaks forth. I have been introduced to Miss Maxwell this morning, and so far from agreeing with what you said about her yesterday, I think her the most interesting, lovely girl I have ever seen — quite beautiful, Mr. Shuttleworth."

"Ah! some people think her so," he replied, "but I don't."

"Have you always entertained that opinion?" Lady Gertrude asked, with a

very inquisitive, meaning look, which caused Alphonso, in his confusion, to give Mameluke a dig in the ribs. Not relishing this treatment, he dashed forward, bringing his master's knee between the hind wheel and pannel of the barouche, whereby he was forthwith dislodged from the saddle, and thrown upon his back, just opposite Lady Gertrude, who could not suppress a rather loud laugh at his grotesque position, which was further increased by an exclamation from an adjoining carriage, — "Oh! me gracious! if there ain't our Halphonso kicked off by that nasty Marmerluke!"

Our hero never picked himself up so nimbly before, and to use the Captain's term, "he cut away like a thief who had prigged a pocket-handkerchief," for he felt that Edith Maxwell's eyes, as well as Lady Gertrude's, were bent upon him.

As Alphonso precipitately retreated, Reginald Knightley rode up, and addressing Lady Gertrude, said, "How can you patronise such a cub?"

"Dunkerton patronises him, why should not I, Mr. Knightley?"

"If from the same motive," Reginald replied sarcastically, "some excuse may be made for you."

"I don't understand your meaning," she said rather haughtily.

"If you do not, then there is no necessity for giving you any further explanation; but is that the sort of person you would like to be seen dancing with at Almack's?"

"Perhaps not, Reginald; yet he is passable in the country."

"*Im*passable anywhere, Gertrude, without striking one as a clod."

"Well," she replied, "he is reported as passing rich, which will pass him anywhere, even at Almack's."

"There are some animals which are dear at any price, and that fellow is one of them. He may be had on easy terms, no doubt, by any pretty woman like yourself, who will take the trouble to catch him: but what a fish to hook!"

"A gold fish, at least, you must admit, Reginald," she said laughing.

"But were I a woman, which, thank goodness, I am not,—don't misunderstand me as reflecting upon the sex, but their unlucky position as compared with ours,—I would much rather have a silver one, that is, a poorer man and a gentleman; but what have we coming this way?" he exclaimed, on turning his head; "by all that's ludicrous! *Père* Shuttleworth as I live! (bowing to the Marchioness) in your ladyship's livery! Well," he continued, "I have heard of a hog in armour, although why one of the porcine race should ever have been encased in a coat of mail I never could understand; but pray look, Emily," addressing the Marchioness, "do look at this extraordinary figure."

"I had rather not, Reginald, or he may see me; pray move your horse to screen me from his sight," which Reginald did as desired, just as Papa Shuttleworth, on passing, had raised his hat; and as at the same time he gave his horse a prick with

his spur, that animal lashed out with his right leg, giving the cotton-spinner such a crack on his boot that, losing his equilibrium, he rolled out of his saddle and lay sprawling on the ground.

"Oh, Reginald!" exclaimed the Marchioness in affright, "what have you done? I fear the poor man is sadly hurt."

"Merely followed your ladyship's instructions," Reginald said in the most unconcerned manner, "but my horse is apt to lift his legs rather high sometimes, especially when he does not like his company."

"Ah, Reginald, you are more wickedly inclined, I fear, than your horse."

"The most innocent, harmless young man in the whole county, begging your ladyship's pardon."

To account for Mr. Shuttleworth's appearance at the lawn meet we must state that, although decidedly disinclined to equestrian exercise, he had been induced, by Captain Duncombe's representations, to honour the Marquis by his attendance upon

this gala day, having been offered the button, the badge of honour, as the proprietor of some large fox coverts in his lordship's hunt.

"Riding, my dear Sir," the Captain replied, in answer to his excuses, "is out of the question on this occasion; you can sit on horseback, I suppose, like scores of others you will meet there; you will show yourself on the lawn, half the county will see you in the Marquis's livery, as a member of his hunt, you can appear at the public breakfast, sip your glass of liqueur, remount your horse, take a look at the hounds, make your bow to the Marchioness in her barouche, and when we trot off to find our fox, you can trot home again."

The little disaster incidental to his polite bow to the Marchioness suggested to Shuttleworth senior the necessity of adopting the latter part of the Captain's advice without a moment's delay; for the crack upon his leg, coupled with his roll out of the pigskin, had not only caused most uncomfort-

able sensations about his whole corporeal; but little dazzling lights were also playing before his eyes, inducing the belief that he was surrounded by myriads of shooting stars, rather than the horses, and hounds, and gay equipages attending the Marquis's grand meet.

Escaping from the throng, Mr. Shuttleworth rode for an open gate leading into a grass field, through which he had passed in the morning, and feeling unable to retain his seat much longer, reeled out of it and lay upon the ground, where he remained for some ten minutes unconscious of all around him.

"Ah, he'll do now," were the first words which reached his ear, as he opened his yet dull and heavy eyes, staring vacantly around him.

"Better have a drop more, Sir," continued the voice of one of the underkeepers; "you be all right again now," putting the mouth of a small bottle to his lips.

Revived by the spirit and water, Mr.

Shuttleworth attempted to rise from his sitting posture, in which he had been supported by the knee of the keeper.

"Better bide still a bit longer, Sir; you baint yerself yet."

"Why, where am I? what has happened?"

"Just a mossel of a faint, that's all, Sir. Bill there 's a-holding of your 'oss, and the hounds be sure to come our way, when they've adone with that ladies' fox in the gorse."

"Show me the road home, my friend," exclaimed Père Shuttleworth, roused to energetic action by the dread of being again involved amongst hounds and horsemen. "Oh dear!—oh! my leg pains me so, I cannot walk."

"Get on your 'oss then, Sir," suggested the keeper.

"No, no, my friend, I could not sit him now; can't you get me a conveyance to Hardington?"

"All the gentlefolk's carriages be gone whome, Sir, but there's the butcher's cart a-coming from the park."

"Ah! well, that must do, anything but riding;" and after rewarding the under-keeper, and giving directions to Bill to bring his horse home, thus ingloriously returned the proud moneyed man from the first and last of his lawn meets.

CHAPTER XII.

We must now return to Woodborough Park, where we left Lady Agnes indulging bitter feelings against her father for his refusal to accept Sir Digby Colville. During the first few days after this, to her grievous disappointment, she gave way to her uncontrolled bad humour, resolutely refusing to leave her room, under the pretext of severe indisposition, and notwithstanding Mrs. Errington's gentle expostulations and unceasing endeavours to induce her petulant pupil to view her father's decision in its proper and true light, as solely solicitous about her own future happiness, she continued obdurately sullen and silent, not condescending at last to make her fondly attached governess and friend any reply.

In the second week, however, a gradual change in her manner was perceptible. She became more cheerful, expressed to Mrs. Errington contrition for her past conduct, and made her appearance at the breakfast and dinner table as usual. Another week passed, and the Earl, hearing from Edmund that Sir Digby Colville had left Dunkerton house, began to think, from his daughter's apparent return of affection towards himself, that she had now seen the folly of her choice.

Not so reasoned Mrs. Errington, who suspected some latent cause for this smooth surface, which to her seemed as a lull before some gathering storm, though she felt reluctant to communicate her suspicions to the Earl, since there was no foundation for them. On the night of the last lawn meet at Dunkerton, Lady Agnes retired to her own room rather earlier than usual, complaining of a bad headache, which from its frequent occurrence excited no further attention, and Edmund not being expected to return that evening, the Earl

and Mrs. Errington soon after sought their own apartments.

That night a presentiment of coming evil took such possession of Mrs. Errington's mind, that she could not sleep; although weary, she felt nervous and restless, with that throbbing pulsation of the head, when laid upon the pillow, which forbids repose. As she lay thus agitated without any apparent cause,—for nothing had transpired that day to occasion her any fresh uneasiness or alarm, — she fancied she heard a step near the bedroom door of Lady Agnes. She listened in breathless suspense. The sound again reached her ear; she sprang instantly from her bed, and hastily putting on her dressing-gown, approached the door of her own room. Here she again stopped to listen — all was silent through that long corridor — so silent that she could hear the beating of her own heart. Still she was not satisfied, she felt convinced her ear had not deceived her. The cold was bitter, piercing to her limbs, which shivered as she stood, yet dared not move.

The house clock struck the hour of twelve; it was midnight, the time when strange sounds are heard, strange sights are seen, by the superstitious. Mrs. Errington was not one of these; yet as the last stroke told out its dying tale of departing night, with its long-drawn sigh through the old oak hall below, a feeling of dread—for what she could not account—crept over her trembling frame. She dreaded to remain longer there, yet feared to return to her bed. The embers in the grate still sent forth a red lurid light, and drawing her easy-chair close to the fender, she sat down to warm her chilled feet; her sense of hearing stretched painfully to its utmost limits, to catch the least passing sound. Silence still reigned around, broken only at intervals by the low moaning of the wind.

Again, one stroke from the old clock rang through the house; but ere its last echo had died away, another sound smote upon her ear. She sprang quickly though noiselessly to the door, and on opening it she confronted a slight, trembling form

gliding hastily along the corridor. It was that of Lady Agnes, equipped in travelling costume, who, thus suddenly surprised, stood motionless and confounded before her.

Mrs. Errington, fearing to disturb the Earl, laid her hand upon her pupil's arm, whispering only, "Come with me." On returning to her room, Lady Agnes threw herself upon the sofa, and covering her face with her hands, burst into tears.

"Oh! Agnes," exclaimed Mrs. Errington, sitting down beside her, and taking her trembling hand in hers, "is it thus, my poor deluded child, you would steal from your father's house, like a thief in the night?"

A fresh outbreak of grief followed this pathetic address, and throwing herself into Mrs. Errington's arms, she wept bitterly. Mrs. Errington did not attempt at first to check her falling tears, but straining her to her heart, and pressing her lips upon her burning cheek, gave way herself to her pent-up feelings, and mingled her tears

with those of Agnes. For some moments neither spoke; the heart of each, during that trying scene, being too full for the utterance of words. At length Mrs. Errington whispered, "Agnes, will you leave me now?"

No response followed this touching appeal, but again her tears flowed fast, and she pressed the hand of her kind instructress to her lips.

"Agnes," she continued, "listen to my words — do not bring misery and disgrace upon your poor father by such an unhallowed act as this. If resolved to marry this man, which I see you are, let that ceremony be performed in the light of day, and with proper witnesses to attest its legality, as befits the only daughter of a noble house. Promise me not to make another attempt to attain the object of your wishes in this clandestine manner, and in return for that promise, should you continue in the same mind, I will endeavour to obtain the Earl's consent, and no allusion to what has now occurred shall ever escape

my lips. Will you give me this sacred promise, Agnes?"

"Yes, dearest Mrs. Errington, I will," Lady Agnes faltered out.

"I thank you, my dearest child, for that promise, which will save you from those bitter reflections invariably attending such unblessed unions as these. You are young and inexperienced in the ways of the world, and in the opinions of worldly men. Sir Digby Colville would be the first to despise you for this too ready compliance with his wishes—and treat you afterwards with cold indifference or contempt; for man's disposition is to despise even the woman he loves, if, in consenting to become his wife, she forgets the respect due to her sex. And now, my dear child, I will leave you to your rest, and to thank the Almighty, I hope, for this providential interruption to your intended wretched flight."

Whatever the faults of Lady Agnes—and she had, like ourselves, many—falsehood was not one. She would speak the truth, and her promise often given to Mrs. Errington

on previous occasions, even when a child, had never been broken.

Mrs. Errington, upon calm reflection, felt she had prescribed for herself a most difficult, and perhaps thankless task, yet, under these extraordinary circumstances, she believed it to be the wisest course she could have adopted, from a thorough knowledge of her pupil's determined disposition; for if placed under restraint and surveillance, she would assuredly rebel against them, and renew her attempts to escape. She had heard also sufficient of Sir Digby Colville to doubt his faith and honour in a clandestine marriage with this infatuated girl, if celebrated after the Scotch fashion; and even if properly and legally performed, all her own money would inevitably pass into her husband's hands. Strong in this conviction, therefore, that she had pursued the most prudent course, her next step was to induce the Earl to acquiesce in her views, with whose scruples and deeply rooted antipathy to the man of his daughter's choice, she had to undergo a severe contest.

The Earl at first was quite astounded by Mrs. Errington's proposition; but as she gradually and most feelingly proceeded to unfold her opinion of the case, his attention became more engaged, and he began to see the hopeless position in which he was placed.

"You cannot coerce, my dear Lord," she said, "your too long spoilt, though deeply-loved child; she has always been allowed, and will still have, her own way; and it is to avoid her certain misery and disgrace, by being thrown entirely into the power of this man, that, after long consideration, I give you that advice, however painful to my own heart, which I should be compelled to adopt were Lady Agnes my own daughter. And you know, my dear Lord, I could scarcely love her more, were it even so. You can then have secured to her, for life at least, the money to which she is entitled, and save it from her husband, by whom, in the other event, it might be squandered, and she left penniless, or solely dependent on his will."

"You have, I fear, my dear friend," the Earl replied, "given me the best counsel, although it is hard, very hard, for a father thus to yield to his child; but I feel now, when, alas! too late, the consequences of my mistaken indulgence. Still I must have time for consideration, and weigh well all you have said."

"And I, my dear Lord, shall still use all my power to avert the evil, though I fear we cannot now avoid it."

After two days' deliberation, and long consultation with Edmund, the Earl was induced to give a reluctant consent to the marriage taking place at the expiration of three months, stipulating that the settlements should be drawn up by his own solicitor, that the marriage should be strictly private, and solemnised in the parish church of Woodborough, although he should not be present at it.

The result of this decision being communicated to Lady Agnes, her promise was obtained, by Mrs. Errington, to comply with these conditions, and in the event of

Sir Digby Colville not agreeing to them, the match should be broken off. Both the Earl and Edmund believed that no gentleman would submit to these humiliating terms, but they were yet more disgusted with Sir Digby's character, upon learning a few days afterwards, from Mrs. Errington, that under pretence of the excessive love he felt for Lady Agnes, her hand would be a sufficient recompence for the indignity offered him by her father.

The true state of the case was: the Irish Baronet, having ascertained that she had fifty thousand pounds at her own disposal, and so much more on attaining the age of twenty-one, resolved at any hazard to clutch this prey which had so unexpectedly fallen in his way, when all his speculations on a successful venture in a matrimonial bargain had through many previous years been doomed to disappointment.

A week had not elapsed since Sir Digby Colville's acquiescence in these conditions, as communicated by letter to Lady Agnes, when the Earl was astonished by his ap-

pearance at Woodborough, but at the same time so indignant, that, refusing an interview, he requested Mrs. Errington to inform him that any communication he had to make must be addressed to his solicitor, as he should decline any conference with Sir Digby himself.

The Irish Baronet seemed exceedingly mortified by this repulse, having indulged the hope of being now received at Woodborough as the Earl's son-in-law elect; but he now found the old Peer composed of much sterner stuff than his friend Dunkerton (to whose house he had again returned) had led him to suppose. The fact was, that the Earl still hoped by these rebuffs to debar Sir Digby from proceeding farther in his suit; but he little knew, until it became gradually developed, the true character of the man he had to deal with, who, to gain his point, would submit to almost any indignity. The Earl, however, resolutely maintained his determination not to admit Sir Digby to any private interviews, and his communication with his

daughter was therefore carried on by letter.

We need make no further comments upon this most unpleasant and unsatisfactory state of things at Woodborough. It may suffice to state that the settlements were drawn up by the Earl's solicitor, in the most stringent manner possible, although by the will under which Lady Agnes became possessed of a hundred thousand pounds, bequeathed by her grandfather, she had the free disposal of this property at her decease, if dying without issue.

Two months had now elapsed; the conditions in the settlement had been assented to by Sir Digby Colville, and as it appeared to Edmund nothing now could intervene to avert the fate of Lady Agnes, his resolution was taken to leave home, in the hope that time and travel might in some measure alleviate his bitter feelings of disappointment and sorrow, which he had struggled in vain to subdue. There was distraction in the thought of witnessing the union of her he had once loved so entirely, with

another, and that other a man he despised and detested more and more for his servile and worldly character. The certain consequences to Lady Agnes also preyed upon his mind, so that he told his sister he could remain no longer in that part of the country, unless she wished to see him in a madhouse.

"Go then, my dear Edmund, I will not oppose your intentions now—you have endured many weeks of trial and sorrow to oblige me. I would not harrow up your past feelings by asking you to remain another week. Our old friends the Egertons are at Florence, why not join them? You can make a tour to beguile your thoughts, and return to us, I trust, before the next hunting season, with amended spirits and a lighter heart."

No sooner had Edmund obtained his sister's approval of his plan than he became impatient of its execution. He felt a feverish longing now to leave those scenes with which his first budding hopes of love and happiness had been so intimately blended, and by escaping from which he hoped to

escape also partly, if not wholly, from the harrowing thoughts those scenes continually presented to his harassed mind.

The Earl could offer no opposition to his wishes.

"It is better you should leave us now," he said, "my poor dear boy, since you cannot do any good by remaining longer, neither could I expect you to be present at a ceremony which even my eyes will never behold. Go, my dear Edmund, for the present — change will perhaps soften, if not obliterate, the remembrance of the past. You are young, and another love may warm your heart. Mine is now cold and crushed for ever."

"Oh, say not so, my dear, kind uncle — things may turn out better than we expect. Sir Digby Colville may prove a good husband, and, when married, may change his former course of life — let us at least hope for the best."

"Hope, which comes to all, comes not to me, my dear Edmund," the Earl replied sorrowfully; "I am desolate and alone."

"Oh! not alone, dear uncle, I will soon return, and never leave you more."

"Then go, dear Edmund—go at once; do not delay your departure now another day—you will the sooner return to me again; but write; write by every post; your letters will be a consolation, something to cheer me day by day, till with God's permission we meet again. And now, my dear boy, not to prolong my misery at this parting, may the Almighty bless and protect you!" and folding him in his arms, the old Peer, unable to suppress his emotion, burst into tears; but quickly recovering himself, he brushed them away, and, after one more silent and fervent embrace, left the room.

Edmund could not in his present state of feelings trust himself to a last interview with Lady Agnes, to whom he requested Mrs. Errington to convey his kind regards and best wishes and hopes for her future happiness. He had now only one more farewell visit to pay; he must bid adieu to Edith Maxwell, and, as he rode on to

Morton Grange, a new train of thoughts occupied his mind. "Would she be Edith Maxwell still when he revisited her present home again?" He thought of the many happy days he had spent with this sweet, lovely girl, and an envious, jealous feeling crept over his heart when he contemplated her as the wife of another man. "Ah!" he murmured, "a barrier will then be placed between us, which none may pass. She will be the property of another; his will and wishes a law to her, upon which friendship must not trespass. Alas! how soon have the once happy day-dreams of my youth passed away; how changed now are all my prospects of happiness! The two dear companions of my happiest hours will have been in a few short months lost to me for ever; and I left, like my poor old friend, to mourn alone the absence of those so long and fondly loved."

Edmund's reverie was suddenly broken by the appearance of that object about whom his thoughts had been so painfully engaged. Edith was walking alone in

the glen, by which the carriage drive led to the house, when, tying his horse to the palings which separated them, he was quickly by her side.

"Edith," he said, after their first salutation had passed, "I am come to bid you farewell. I leave home to-morrow for a long journey, and who can tell when I may return?"

"Oh, Edmund!" she faltered, in surprise and agitation not to be controlled; "why do you thus suddenly leave us — why are you going?"

"Well, dear Edith, as I have never seen any save my native land, I think, now the hunting is over, of spending a few months on the continent; after which," he added with a sickly smile, "I hope to return a polished man of the world, since in these times travellers appear to be the especial favourites with ladies, by whom we poor stay-at-home fox-hunters are completely thrown into the shade."

Although surmising to whom he alluded, Edith made no response, her mind being

too much occupied with other painful thoughts.

"Ere that time comes," continued Edmund, "you, like your friend, may be changed in name as well as heart towards the companion of your youth."

"Oh, no, no, Edmund!" she said, as her tearful eyes were raised for a moment to his, "my affection for you will never change."

They walked on in silence, the hearts of both being too full for words, when, as they reached the little gate opening to the lawn in front of the house, where large evergreens hid them still from view, Edmund said abruptly, "Here, here let us part, dear Edith — I could not bid you farewell in the presence of others — my heart is too full."

Poor Edith, unable to check her emotion, offering her hand, burst into tears, when Edmund, on the impulse of the moment, caught her to his heart, whispering, "Dear, dear Edith, forgive me this embrace, I did not think you loved me thus. Now

God bless you, my dear, sweet girl; I will soon return."

Edith sprang from his arms, and turning into another path, was quickly lost to his view; and Edmund, after wishing the Colonel and Mrs. Maxwell a hasty good-bye, mounted his horse and rode rapidly away.

Edith, on reaching her own room, gave way once more to an uncontrolled flood of tears. The veil had been suddenly removed from her mental eye—her heart's true feelings were disclosed—she knew and felt now for the first time that she loved Edmund Knightley with an affection widely different from that with which she had before believed she regarded him.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Have I then no tears for thee, my father?
Can I forget thy cares, from helpless years,
Thy tenderness for me? an eye still beam'd
With love—a brow that never knew a frown—
Not a harsh word thy tongue? Shall I for these
Repay thy stooping, venerable age
With shame, disquiet, anguish, and dishonour?"

It is the last morning of May, a dull heavy mist hangs suspended 'twixt earth and heaven, like a dark curtain o'erspreading this lower hemisphere, which the rays of the sun attempt in vain to penetrate. There is not a breath of air to shake from the hawthorn tree its loaded dewdrops, but an oppression in the atmosphere portending thunder, and all nature seems

mourning in this heavy gloom the departing hours of blithesome spring.

> "Hush'd are the birds, and closed the drooping flow'rs."

It is the bridal morn of Lady Agnes. Beneath the large portico of Woodborough House two carriages are in waiting, one belonging to the Earl, the other to Colonel and Mrs. Maxwell, who, with Edith as bridesmaid, are to accompany the bride to the parish church. As the clock strikes eleven Lady Agnes appears in the hall, supported by her friend and instructress, Mrs. Errington. She is weeping bitterly, and scarcely able to support her trembling frame. The last agitating parting with her kind, indulgent, but now almost broken-hearted father has caused those tears to flow, that obdurate heart to palpitate with those awakened feelings, too long suppressed. The voice of conscience will be heard at last — the claim of nature can no longer be denied. It comes too late

for retraction — the die is cast, but the first tears of repentance have been shed — the beginning of that sorrow for wilful disobedience which will never cease.

The poor old Earl has shut himself up in his private room, to mourn in silent and secret sorrow the impending fate of his wayward, though still dearly loved child, which he has in vain, by entreaties and expostulations, attempted to avert. Even the servants move noiselessly and stealthily about the house, as if the funeral, instead of the bridal, of their young mistress were about to take place. The face of Edmund's favourite footman, Thomas, is sad and pale; and the old butler, who stands bareheaded, with his silvery hair, at the hall door, cannot suppress his strong emotion, for down his wrinkled cheek the expressed drops of sorrow are slowly trickling, and his choking voice refuses to utter the words hovering on his lips — he cannot falter out the common farewell, "God bless you!"

As Lady Agnes passes the threshold of her once loved and happy home—a home

to her no longer now—the old Newfoundland dog, Hero, raises his shaggy frame from the door-mat, and, slowly wagging his tail, fixes his large mournful eyes upon the face of his young mistress with an appealing look which strikes her to the heart. Stooping low to conceal her tears, she imprinted a hasty kiss upon his honest head, and then rushing down the steps, threw herself into the carriage, giving way to a fresh outbreak of grief.

Colonel Maxwell stood alone the only unmoved spectator of this trying scene, his stern, rigid features unrelaxed by the tears and sorrows of those around him; when, having assisted his wife, Mrs. Errington, and Edith into the Earl's large carriage, he calmly entered his own, with that grave composure which scenes of strife and bloodshed, cries of pain and anguish, in many a hard fought fight, had stamped upon his brow, which appeared impervious to all human suffering.

As they approached the porch of the old ivy-clad church, the Marquis of Dun-

kerton and Sir Digby Colville, with Lady Gertrude Lennard, attired as a bridesmaid, were waiting to receive the party; and as they traversed the long, damp, dreary aisle leading to the altar, echo returned from the deserted pews the sound of their own passing footsteps only; for, save the officiating clergyman and clerk, not another human being was visible in that house of God—not even the happy faces of thoughtless curious children, to cheer with their smiles the bridal of Lady Agnes—so deep was the sympathy of the whole village for the kind-hearted, charitable old Earl in the bereavement of his only child by this ill-fated marriage.

The ceremony began—the clear, full, though tremulous tones of the venerable vicar rang through that vaulted roof, startling by their distinctness the ears of all assembled; but when, with more than usual impressive solemnity he pronounced the charge, "I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all

hearts shall be disclosed"—the face of Sir Digby Colville paled, his lips quivering with ill-suppressed emotion, and the head of Lady Agnes fell buried in her hands, with a shuddering overpowering sensation, on the cushioned rail beside her. The Marquis even trembled, as he stood surveying the unhallowed work of his own devising—and with a cold shiver beheld his prostrate victim, bound with cords woven by his own hand, before the altar of an offended God.

On the question being asked, "Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" the stiff, formal Colonel came forward to perform the ungracious part allotted to him, and then falling back, with folded arms and compressed lips, gazed stedfastly upon the kneeling forms before him.

All is over now; Lady Agnes is assisted in rising by the man she has just sworn, in the presence of her Maker, to love, honour, and obey! How strong, how passing strange in its very strength, the power of

that passion we call love! which tears the timid maiden from her home, leaving parents, brothers, sisters, friends, all behind — all, all forsaken, for the love of one, almost a stranger, whom she has invested with perfections conjured up by fancy's dream, and for whom she has rudely reft asunder all other ties — for whom she has bartered the long-tried, constant loves of all else beside!

Lady Agnes had made her cast on this one die, despite the warnings of relations and friends; she had now obtained the object of her morbid fancy; she was now the wife of a man whom she knew not, save by name, and whose name she must now bear, whose fortunes she must follow, through all the strange vicissitudes of life, for weal or woe!

After one more parting embrace from Mrs. Errington and Edith, Lady Agnes Colville was handed by her now smiling husband into a travelling chariot with four posters, in waiting at the churchyard gate, and whirled rapidly away. The Colonel

and Mrs. Maxwell returned directly to Morton Grange, whilst Edith and Mrs. Errington were borne back in the Earl's carriage to Woodborough Park; not amidst a merry peal of bells, for not the chime of a bell was heard that day to greet the bridal of the Earl's daughter.

On reaching home, both immediately ascended to their rooms, to change their gay attire for one more sombre and befitting this mournful occasion, to which, by tacit consent, no further allusion was made. The hour of luncheon arrived, but the Earl still remaining shut up in his own room, Mrs. Errington said, "Perhaps, my dear Edith, you may induce our afflicted friend to take a glass of wine and a biscuit, for he has not tasted anything the whole of this day."

The hint was sufficient, and the next minute Edith's light tap was heard at his door.

"Who is there?" the Earl asked, without opening it.

"Edith Maxwell."

"What, you still here, my dear?" the Earl inquired; "I thought you had returned home with your mother."

"No, my dear Lord, I wished to remain with you a few days, if my presence will not be irksome to you."

"That, my dear child, you know it never is," as he opened the door to admit her; "why have you brought me this, my dear?" he asked, taking from her hand the glass of wine and biscuit, and placing them on the table.

"Not to remain there," she said, with her sweet smile; "you will not be so ungallant as to refuse the glass of wine which I have taken so much trouble to bring you, without spilling a drop. You must drink it now," she said cheerfully, taking it again from the table, and offering it.

"Well, my child, to oblige you, I will do as you desire, although I do not require anything."

"Yes, my dear Lord, indeed you do; you have not taken anything the whole morning; neither have I had any breakfast,

will you, therefore, give me a little luncheon, for Mrs. Errington has gone to her room, and I cannot eat alone."

"Well, my dear, then I will go with you," and they entered the dining-room together, where both sat down and made a slight repast.

The wind had now risen, rolling the thick mist away, like a folded curtain, to the tops of the hills, and the meridian sun burst forth in its full splendour, enlivening all nature with its cheering rays. Even the heavy heart of the afflicted Peer could not wholly resist its gladdening influence, and at Edith's earnest solicitation, he was induced to take a short stroll with her through the pleasure grounds. The soft tones of his companion's sweet voice fell like gentle melody upon his ear, and he felt grateful for the presence of this dear girl, to comfort him in his bereavement, who, whilst walking by his side, beguiled him of his melancholy thoughts.

The next morning the Earl, in deference to his young guest, appeared as usual at

the breakfast table, when he was cheered by a long letter from his favourite Edmund, who wrote from Paris, in better spirits than might have been expected, concluding thus: "I hope dear Edith may be with you when you receive this letter, to cheer you in your solitude. She is a sweet, affectionate girl, and pray assure her of my most tender regard."

"Here, my dear," the Earl said, handing her the letter, "there is a message to you from Edmund."

The heightened colour with which Edith perused its contents, did not escape the notice of Mrs. Errington, but the Earl was too busy with others to observe the change.

It was generally at this season of the year that the Colonel and Mrs. Maxwell spent a month with an old brother officer in Yorkshire; and the third day after the marriage of Lady Agnes, Mrs. Maxwell called at Woodborough, to take her daughter with them. The old Earl's countenance fell when apprised of her mother's intentions, and he sat for a moment thoughtful

and abstracted, which Mrs. Maxwell observing, said, "Dear Lord Woodborough, perhaps you would like to have Edith a little longer?"

"I would not detain her in this melancholy place, my dear Madam, she has suffered sufficient penance already, and I am sure change of scene will be of great service to her, and not before it is needed."

"Well then, we will leave Edith to determine whether she prefers going with us for our usual month in Yorkshire, or remaining at Woodborough;—what say you, my love?" Mrs. Maxwell asked.

"I would much rather remain here, dearest Mamma, if you do not require me with you."

"Not in the least, my dear child, and you know Hursley Hall is not very gay with our gouty old friend, the General; so, my dear Lord, if you are not tired of her, Edith shall be your guest until we return."

The Earl cast a grateful look upon Edith, as he replied, "I fear your dear child will be tired of my disagreeable society long

before I shall feel tired of her cheerful companionship; but if she prefers remaining here, I must exert myself to render her visit as pleasurable as I can make it."

"Then," said Mrs. Maxwell, "as I am now rather busied in preparations for our long journey, I must wish you good-bye;" and after a warm embrace between mother and daughter, Mrs. Maxwell left Woodborough, more pleased than ever with Edith, for her generous sympathy with the unhappy Earl.

That evening, after dinner, the Earl appeared to have recovered some of his usual serenity, and turning to Edith, said, "You have made a very bad choice, my dear, in kindly remaining with me, but having done so, I must afford you all the pleasure and amusement in my power: I know you like horse exercise, and Edmund's horses being here, I shall select his favourite hack Marmion, which has often carried his sister, for your especial use, and I am sure he will be delighted to hear he is so highly favoured, by your

riding him. Now, therefore, my dear child, you will find me always at your service as your cavalier after breakfast, leaving you to drive Mrs. Errington in the pony carriage during the afternoon."

We need hardly say that the charitable object of this kind-hearted, affectionate girl was accomplished, in diverting, by her presence and unwearied attentions, the mind of her venerable friend, from dwelling too long on his desolate condition. For three long dreary months the Earl's mind had been on the rack, distracted with doubts, fears, and hopes—expecting something might intervene to prevent his daughter's marriage taking place; but now the worst had happened, he felt relieved of that dreadful burden,—even more insupportable than actual suffering—the burden of suspense.

A few days after he had commenced his rides with Edith, the Earl received another letter from Edmund, expressing his joy at finding her still with him, and speaking in the highest terms of her affectionate

conduct to his dear uncle. "Tell from me," he added, "that I fully ap ciate her kind motives in remaining Woodborough, and that she must he forth consider Marmion her own prope as a gift from her old and true fri Edmund, who is delighted to hear of carrying her so well, and that on return home, I hope to bring with something more worthy her acceptance.

Edmund's letters were always han by the Earl to Edith, and the pleasure derived from their perusal, generally taining some kind message to her proved a sufficient reward for the li attentions bestowed by her upon his g father.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE is an old proverb in regard to marriage, the truth of which has always appeared to me very questionable—"Happy the wooing that's not long a-doing."

It seems, however, that our friend Alphonso entertained a different opinion to mine on this subject, by the haste with which matters had been progressing between Lady Gertrude and himself; although it must be admitted that he was strongly urged on in his wooing by his backer the Captain, who with his *protégé* had been invited to dine several times during the past month at Dunkerton House. Alphonso felt not a little elated, and conceited also, by the favour shown him by a nobleman in the position of the Marquis

of Dunkerton, whose name was now continually on his lips. "The Marquis did this, or said that," in short, almost everything he said or did in his presence, was detailed, with an assumed air of consequence, to his friends and acquaintances. He had also remained one whole night at Dunkerton House, of which he informed Major Townshend the next time he met him by saying, "The Marquis is a good sort of fellow, Townshend — I dined and slept with him the other night."

"Did you, by gad?" remarked the Major, "that is coming to close quarters, and, by gad, Sir, much as I like Dunkerton, I should be deuced sorry to have him as a bed-fellow; for he is just the fellow to kick one pretty hard on the shins, as my old companion between the sheets used to do at school."

"Oh no, Townshend, I didn't mean that. I should have said, I slept at Dunkerton House."

"Well," added the Major, "that is nothing particular to boast of, for I met Tom Savage

the other day, who had been staying there a week, and what do you think he said? That the Marquis wasn't bad company, although not so smart a fellow over the mahogany, as the Duke of B. Dunkerton backed Tom heavily in his late fight with Bill Barker."

"He must be an impudent rascal, Townshend, to speak of the Marquis in such an impertinent manner."

"Very likely, Shuttleworth, but you have heard the old saying, 'too much familiarity creates contempt;' and if Dunkerton invites such fellows as these to his house, he must expect to have some of their sauce. But I am told you are likely to become a relative of Dunkerton's."

"Well—no—can't say much about that at present, Townshend. Lady Gertrude is a clipper, and no mistake; but you see she is a high stepper too, although a deuced pretty girl."

"Well, she'll raise you a step or two, my boy, in the scale of society; and if I were a single man with plenty of the needful, like yourself, I should try my

luck with her. Thorough-bred cattle are always the best — figure and form, Sir, there you have it, — looks like a filly to win the Oaks, and somehow or other these spicy ones make the best wives, when brought into training. There was Dashwood of ours, who married the daughter of the Duke of Tadcaster, and, by gad, Sir, although a delicate little thing to look at, she roughed it with him through the whole Peninsular war—killed half a dozen Frenchmen with her own hand one night when they broke into camp, and saved her wounded husband's life."

A few days after this conversation with Major Townshend, Alphonso consulted his friend the Captain upon the subject of Lady Gertrude.

"I say, Duncombe, what do you think of that young woman up at the big house yonder?"

"You mean Lady Gertrude, I suppose."

"Yes, that's the ticket."

"Well, I have told you more than once what I think about her."

"Will she do, then?"

"Do for what?"

"Why for me?"

"Yes, she *will do* for you, my boy."—Aside, "In more senses than one."

"Well, Duncombe, you see the governor has bought that Grimstone Hall, which he says he shall give me when I am coupled up, and I've a great mind to set up in business on my own account."

"Which means, I conclude, to get married."

"Just so, Duncombe. The governor has become very fidgety, and mother is always kicking up a row about my coming home so late at night; and if you had heard her the other day, when my dog Billy followed me into the drawing-room, and had a set-to with the cat on her best hearth-rug, you'd have thought the house was on fire. So I think the old pair of birds will do best by themselves, and I shall look out for a nest of my own, and a wife to help keep it warm."

"Oh! of course," the Captain *said*—and

thought, "Lady Gertrude will warm your ears, my boy, if you bring that devil of a bull-dog into her drawing-room."

"Well, but Duncombe, I made a bad shot at Miss Maxwell—by the way, she looked very seedy at the lawn meet—quite gone off——."

"Your books, of course," the Captain added, "because the grapes are sour."

"Well, Duncombe, never mind about her now,—but as they say in France, *revenons à notre mouton*—I think Lady Gertrude will suit me; but that popping the question is worse than the great go at Oxford."

"Well, you made a bad go there with the classics—and your governor made as bad a go here with his didactics to the Colonel—so now you had better have a go at the young lady yourself."

"I shall never go up to the scratch, Duncombe, unless I can get some fellow to back me."

"How? leading you up, as his second does a pugilist, to face his opponent?"

"No, Duncombe, I mean in the pen and ink line; and if you will just come up to my den, you might lend a fellow a hand."

"Oh, willingly, although I am not over grand at composition."

Pen and paper being produced, Alphonso sat down to write at the Captain's dictation.

"Well, Jack, how will you begin?"

"By Jove, that's just what has been puzzling my head the last week; I don't know how to begin — but if I could once make a start, I might then get on."

"Now, what do you think of this beginning? 'My dearest Angel ——'"

"That's coming it pretty strong, eh, Duncombe? Gad! she may flare up at being called an angel."

"Not a bit of it, but she would if you called her a woman, like an old tramper I met on the turnpike road yesterday."

"What was that?"

"Why, I saw a big powerful woman dragging an unfortunate little pedlar about by the hair of his head, and upon my inquiring the cause of this rough usage, the

virago said, 'I'll sarve him out for calling me a woman.' — 'Then what are you,' I asked, 'a man in petticoats?'"

"'No, I ain't, Mr. Saucebox,' she replied, 'but a respectable female!' So you see, Jack, women must not be called women — but angels, divine creatures — that sort of thing."

"Well, let it stand then — so now for the second go, *in medius res* — into the pith of the letter."

"Your divine charms have inspired me with a passion that is rapidly consuming the very vitals of my heart, which will very soon be reduced to powder."

"That's pretty stiff, Duncombe."

The Captain proceeds — "I am burning like a volcano to lay myself at the feet of my adorable enchantress, and become for ever your devoted and enraptured slave!"

"By Jove, this is hot work," — taking off his coat — "I vote we have a bottle of iced champagne."

"With all my heart, Jack, — pull the bell." Duncombe continues:—

"Oh, dearest Lady Gertrude, deign to bestow one kind approving look at him who lives only in the sunshine of your smiles. Let me not appeal in vain to that soft heart, to save me from endless misery and despair."

"Well, that will do, Duncombe, won't it? What's the use of writing more?"

"Let us finish the champagne, and then we can add something a little more spicy, to top up with; — some poetry for instance — hand us some books, and see if we can find anything suitable — ah! here's the very thing!"

"Sweet are the charms of her I love,
More fragrant than the damask rose;
Soft as the down of turtle dove,
Gentle as air when zephyr blows,
Refreshing as descending rains
To sun-burnt climes and thirsty plains.

True as the needle to the pole,
Or as the dial to the sun,
Constant as gliding waters roll
Whose swelling tides obey the moon!
From ev'ry other charmer free,
My life and love are all for thee."

The letter being finished, and sealed, Alphonso said, "Now, Duncombe, how are we to send it?"

"By post of course, Jack, then nobody here will know anything about this go of yours for a wife; and I will ride over to breakfast with Dunkerton to-morrow morning, and speak a good word for you."

The amusement of Lady Gertrude, at Alphonso's expense, when reading his love letter, was so great that she burst out into a fit of laughter, and handing it to her cousin, Dunkerton also was no less edified with its contents, saying, he had never thought Jack a poet before; "but, by Jove," he added, "that fellow may be made something of, he has a very lofty imagination."

"Well, Charles," she asked, "what am I to do with him?"

"Just what you please, Gertrude. I think that is clear enough; and if the governor, as he is called, will make you a thorough good settlement — say three or

four thousand a year — my advice to you is to accept him, and I will see things properly done — leave the bargaining part of the affair to me."

"Well, Charles, I must consider it well, before giving my final answer."

"You may as well make up your mind at once, Gertrude, for we go to town the beginning of next week, and I had better arrange the preliminaries with Mr. Shuttleworth before I leave the country."

"I cannot answer his letter until the afternoon," Lady Gertrude replied, in a very serious tone; "and now, Charles, you will excuse me going to my own room."

Upon the Captain's arrival a short time afterwards, the Marquis and himself enjoyed a hearty laugh together over Alphonso's curious epistle, in the concoction of which Duncombe explained how he had taken the greatest share, amidst renewed roars of merriment.

"Well," the Marquis said, "I thought some mischievous fellow like yourself had a hand in it; but don't tell Lady Gertrude

this, or she will think the whole affair a hoax, and I really think they will do very well together, if Père Shuttleworth will bleed freely."

"Stick the lancet in pretty deep, he is a plethoric fellow as to money, and will bear draining; but make sure of what you can get, for these speculators are ticklish men to deal with — here to-day and gone to-morrow."

That same evening, upon calm reflection, Lady Gertrude resolved to accept our friend Alphonso, for better or worse, and wrote him a quiet lady-like letter, expressing her desire to relieve him from the anxiety under which he appeared to be suffering, but at the same time stating her disinclination to receive his addresses before consulting her father and mother.

Our hero was in ecstasies on the receipt of her letter, reading it at least fifty times, and immediately after breakfast, drove over to Dunkerton House, to express in person his grateful feelings to Lady Gertrude, in thus far conceding to his wishes.

A few days after, upon his calling again, his happiness was completed by the information that the Earl and Countess of Bragborough had consented to Lady Gertrude's marriage, provided there were sufficient means to render them comfortable in wedded life, and as befitted their daughter's rank.

Alphonso, after throwing himself at the feet of his enchantress, vowing eternal love and fidelity, and almost devouring her hand with rapturous kisses, set off directly for Hardington, to acquaint his papa and mamma with the successful issue of his suit.

"There, mother," he said, "you will now have a real lady for your daughter, — and such a dear, charming little thing — you will soon be as much in love with her as I am."

"I don't know that, my dear John, for these high-bred ladies don't suit my taste, they always give themselves so many airs; Miss Hedith was my choice; — but there, 'tis no use crying for spilt milk.

His papa, however, was of a very different opinion—ambition being his ruling passion; and by his son's marriage with a peer's daughter, he hoped through this connection, and with the aid of Lord Dunkerton, to obtain the long-coveted advancement into aristocratic circles. With this view, therefore, his proposals of settlement to the Marquis, on the marriage of his cousin, were exceedingly liberal—far beyond his expectations—proposing to give Grimston Hall, with eight thousand a year, to his son, and four thousand as a jointure to Lady Gertrude. The Marquis expressing his satisfaction with this handsome proposition, it was agreed that the settlements should be drawn up by his lordship's solicitor, and the marriage solemnised in town, from the Earl of Bragborough's residence.

CHAPTER XV.

A FORTNIGHT had now elapsed since the marriage of Lady Agnes, during which Mrs. Errington and Edith had been each favoured with a letter from her, expressive of her great happiness with Sir Digby Colville, whose devotion and attention exceeded her most sanguine hopes. They were now travelling on the continent, intending to remain abroad some months, and Mrs. Errington's kind influence with her father was solicited to obtain his forgiveness for her late waywardness, and receive her upon her return to England.

To this request the Earl so far conceded as to say, he should be glad to see her at Woodborough, although he must decline a visit from her husband.

To Edith Maxwell, the time passed as happily as her now awakened feelings would admit, in her present doubtful position. She looked forward to the receipt of letters from Edmund to the Earl with nervous anxiety, and any kind notice of herself was treasured up in her mind, with an earnestness she could no longer conceal. She would often ramble alone through paths and walks which they had trod together, in the careless, joyous days of early youth, as boy and girl. "What are his feelings now towards me?" she would ask. "Are his changed like mine—or—" she shuddered at the thought—"have I allowed myself to love in vain?" and yet Edmund's last words, and fervent embrace when parting with her by the little wicket gate at Morton Grange, tended to nourish the seeds of hope, which had now taken root, and were springing up in her heart.

To Mrs. Errington alone had her secret been revealed, by observing her varying colour and nervousness of manner when

the Earl handed her Edmund's letters to peruse; although she carefully avoided any expression of her conjectures to Edith, fearing to encourage her with expectations which might never be realised; yet both herself and the Earl, when alone, could not forbear expressing their wishes that Edmund might select Edith for his wife.

Chetwynd called several times at Woodborough, and was invited once to dine there by the Earl, although receiving no encouragement from Edith, whom he could never find alone, and her behaviour in no wise tended to induce the belief of her sentiments having undergone any change in his favour, since her rejection of his proposal at the ball; but, supported by the Colonel's approbation of his suit, Chetwynd resolved to persevere.

We must now pass over two months. It is the beginning of August. Colonel Maxwell, with Edith and her mother, is seated at the breakfast table, when the servant enters with the letter bag.

"Here, Edith," her father said, "is one for you — it looks like the hand-writing of Lady Agnes."

She broke the seal, and continued quietly reading the contents, until the last sentence, which sent the blood rushing back to her heart, her face assuming the paleness of death, — when, feeling about to faint, she rose hastily from the table and left the room.

"Edith has had some bad news this morning, I fear," Mrs. Maxwell remarked, "I must go and hear what it is." And on reaching her daughter's room, she lay fainting on the sofa, with the open letter on the carpet, where it had fallen from her hand. Mrs. Maxwell rushed to her child's assistance, and with the help of restoratives, she was soon brought back to consciousness; but to her mother's question of what had happened, she made no reply, and covering her face with her hands, burst into tears.

Mrs. Maxwell seized the letter, hastily scanning its contents, until these words

caught her attention: —"Edmund is here, and the Egertons, he is constantly with them, and report goes, engaged to be married to Lucy. I thought him *épris* with you, dear Edith, as you would just have suited each other."

The truth flashed directly upon Mrs. Maxwell's mind — the cause of her child's sudden fainting fit was revealed — she loved Edmund Knightley.

"Oh, my own dearest Edith," she cried, throwing her arms round her neck, "do not give way thus — it is only a report, it may not be true."

"Yes, dear Mamma, I feel it is too true — a foreboding of evil has been hanging over me for some time — but oh! this dreadful feeling now! I am overpowered with shame, to think I should have loved one who has never sought my love; but oh! in compassion to my misery, do not let my father know the secret you have discovered, of my misplaced attachment. I feel I have done very wrong, but thrown as we were together so much, I could not

help feeling more than common regard for one so amiable and so good. Yet not until our last parting here, did I know myself the true state of my heart."

"Do not distract yourself, my own beloved child, with these sad reflections, for even I thought Edmund attached to you, and still it may be the case."

"Oh! no — no — my own dear mother, let me no longer indulge such fond delusive hopes. I will rouse myself from this too happy dream, and no one but yourself shall ever know that I have loved in vain."

For three days Edith struggled to suppress all outward show of the anguish which was wringing her heart; but on the third evening she was seized with cold shivering fits, succeeded at night by a burning fever. The Colonel and her mother becoming much alarmed, their medical attendant was immediately sent for, who prescribed everything his skill could suggest; but "who can minister to a mind diseased?" For several days poor

Edith seemed to hover between life and death, during which her mother scarcely quitted her bedside; — but at last a change came for the better; the fever gradually abated, although leaving her weak and almost helpless as a child.

Pending her illness, Chetwynd called every day, expressing the deepest grief and anxiety, and sending presents of the choicest fruits and flowers his hot-houses and gardens produced; and his excessive delight when informed of her amendment, and gradual recovery, convinced the Colonel and Mrs. Maxwell of his strong affection for their child. Emmeline Knightley had now become an inmate of Morton Grange, sharing with Mrs. Maxwell her anxious watchings over her afflicted friend; who, now that the crisis had passed, began slowly to recover her lost strength, and at the end of three weeks, although pale, weak, and almost the ghost of her former self, poor Edith again descended to her little morning room, from which she could walk out upon the flower-garden, leaning on

Emmeline's arm, and cheered by her soft winning smile and heart-felt compassion into a more complacent frame of mind.

Although not before suspecting it, the cause of Edith's illness became revealed to her friend, by the agitation she exhibited one morning when reading part of a letter received from her brother, still at Florence, in which he wrote of Lucy Egerton as wonderfully improved, and now become a most delightful, entertaining companion. On her reading these words, Edith turned deadly pale, and fell back almost fainting in her chair.

"Dearest Edith," cried Emmeline, springing to her side in a moment, "you are, I fear, very ill — what can I get for you?"

"A little sal-volatile only, dearest Emmy, — I feel faint, perhaps from the heat of the room."

When recovered a short time after, Edith could not resist her impulsive desire to know the worst, by asking, whilst a hectic hue suffused her face, — "Is not your brother engaged to Lucy Egerton?"

"Oh, no Edith, not that I am aware of, and I think Edmund would certainly have told me had such been the case."

Edith breathed more freely, and, for a moment, one of her former happy smiles stole over her expressive, and now animated features.

"It is enough," thought Emmeline, "I know now the secret of your heart, my own dear, sweet sister, — you love my brother Edmund, — and that love I hope and trust to see returned."

Emmeline rose, and clasping Edith to her heart, with more warm and tender feelings than she had ever felt towards her before, said in a low tone, "May your hopes, and mine also, be realised, my own dearest Edith!"

The same afternoon Emmeline Knightley was obliged to return home, but she had the satisfaction of leaving her friend much improved in health and spirits, for a ray of hope had been thrown upon Edith's heart by Emmeline's opinion that her brother was not engaged to Lucy Egerton; the

thought however occurred to her upon reflection, "He may be attached to her — there must be some cause for his protracted stay at Florence."

The next day Mrs. Errington again called, and remained with her the greatest part of the morning; the Earl or herself having driven over to Morton Grange every day since her illness. Mrs. Errington said the Earl had received another letter from Edmund, who appeared quite in love with Florence, — (poor Edith thought of his love for Lucy Egerton) — speaking in raptures of that beautiful city, its grand palaces and picturesque villas on the side of the hills, surrounded by olive groves, with a view of the beautiful Arno winding through the town and valley; "but he says," continued Mrs. Errington, "that the heat is so oppressive there that he is going next week with his friends, the Egertons, to the Lucca Baths."

Mrs. Errington little imagined the pang her last words had sent through the heart of her she had come to comfort and console,

and after her departure, poor Edith sought her own room, there once more to weep and mourn her ill-fated love for Edmund Knightley.

"Oh!" she murmured, "it is, alas! too true; he loves another, and thus ends my happiness for life. Yes — though I blush to own it — I do love, esteem, and feel for him what I never have felt, never can feel for another; but those feelings I must never again indulge. Oh! from this hour let me strive to obliterate the memory of the past. My pride forbids me ever again to betray those emotions which it is my duty to suppress. I may think of him only as a brother or friend; but better, far better, could I think of him no more.!"

From this time Edith kept a careful watch over her thoughts and feelings; and strengthened by her better judgment, strove, by constant employment of her mind in reading wholesome and religious books, to divert her ideas into a more healthy channel; and with her high sense of religion, she began to view this afflicting trial

as a warning to set her affections more on things in heaven than upon those on earth. "A few years more," she thought, "and all here will be as if it had never been, — our joys, our hopes, our sorrows, and our sufferings will all have come to an end. In that better, happier world beyond the skies, love will be without dissimulation, pure and holy, such as angels feel. There will be no fear, no care, no anxiety about those we love; no bond or marriage tie to hold loving hearts together."

Thus Edith reasoned and reflected, until she could look even upon Edmund's marriage with Lucy Egerton without jealousy, if not with complacency. Time passed slowly on, — it ever passes slowly to the sorrowful and afflicted — but it brought healing on its wing to the wounded heart of Edith Maxwell. There was a feeling also of degradation in the thought of having given her affections, unsolicited, unsought for, to one who had never regarded her in any other light than that of a friend. She had now recovered from her illness, the cause

of which was known only to her mother; and even her knowledge of it became now a source of uneasiness. "But," she exclaimed with sudden energy, "none other shall ever have reason to suspect the humiliating truth! Henceforth I will rouse myself to appear cheerful and happy as usual in company, and in my own room alone throw off this disguise!"

She had been told by her mother of Mr. Chetwynd's unremitting attentions and genuine sorrow during her illness, but she had been told nothing more. Not a remark further passed her mother's lips, who felt too acutely for her child to say one word as to the too evident object of his visits; and, to confess the truth, Edith's choice would have been her mother's also, for she loved and esteemed Edmund Knightley far above all the young men in the county. Edith, however, pondered on these things. She possessed a feeling and grateful heart, and after Chetwynd's deep interest in her welfare, she could not receive him with her former indifference.

Chetwynd marked the change in her conduct towards him, and hope began to revive in his breast. His visits were continued; they were left sometimes alone, but there was a restless look and nervousness in her manner, which checked the renewed expression of his love, when hovering on his lips. Chetwynd had become changed also; a softened, mellowed expression beamed in his dark hazel eyes, which had entirely lost their former fierce and piercing look. His voice had assumed a low melodious tone, and his manner a most deferential character, although coupled with the most tender anxiety; and Edith could not fail, with her warm heart, to appreciate all his little attentions, although it pained her to think she could make only one return — that of gratitude.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was now the last week in October. Edith had nearly recovered her strength and health, and Chetwynd was becoming tired with this—to his naturally impetuous disposition — long probation of his love. It was now that his impatient restless look again attracted her attention. The expression of his wild piercing eye again filled her with apprehension as to his real disposition, and the words of Captain Duncombe recurred to her memory, — "Would you marry a heathen?" There was horror in this thought. Eight months had elapsed since Chetwynd had obtained the Colonel's approval of his suit, which, in compliance with his suggestions, he had forborne to urge further; but his patience having now

become completely exhausted, he entreated the Colonel's kind aid and assistance, by speaking to his daughter upon the subject, or permitting him to plead his own cause.

"Well, well, Chetwynd," Colonel Maxwell said, "you are certainly entitled to our best wishes for all your attentions and devotion to my child, and I have now no hesitation in using my influence with her, since I have had so many proofs of your constant and sincere attachment."

The same evening the Colonel was proceeding to lay before Edith Mr. Chetwynd's proposal in his usual methodical manner, when she said, "Dear papa, I have already told Mr. Chetwynd, when he spoke to me before, it was out of my power to regard him otherwise than as a friend."

"Well, well, my dear, second thoughts are sometimes best; you have not, perhaps, sufficiently reflected on the many advantages you would derive from this connection, which it is my duty as your father to point out *seriatim*, and to which, without inter-

ruption, I request your particular attention. In the first place then — which I consider of greater importance than wealth — Chetwynd is a thorough gentleman, of very old family, clever, generous, and possessing a very warm heart, — and what young ladies regard, perhaps, more than these — exceedingly good-looking. Yes, my dear, you must admit that he is a fine, handsome man; and as to age, just in the prime and vigour of manhood, having now reached his fortieth year, a period when men's habits and opinions become confirmed, when they attain that stability of character rarely to be found in young gentlemen of twenty-five, and therefore more likely to prove a faithful and attentive husband. A man of forty who has passed through the ordeal of life, with fortune and constitution unimpaired by extravagance and gaiety, gives security for a long and healthy term of life; so that at sixty he would still be hale and hearty; and you see, my dear, the disparity of age is therefore of no moment, but rather an advantage.

Moreover, my dear Edith, your marriage with Mr. Chetwynd would have a great recommendation to us in another respect, that your mother and myself would have the comfort and consolation of your living so near to us that it could scarcely be called a separation; and our properties, which now join, would become eventually consolidated in one family. Lastly, Mr. Chetwynd has made the most handsome and liberal offers of settlement, and surely after the excessive devotion and attention he has shown you, you cannot doubt the strength of his attachment."

"Although very grateful, dear Papa, to Mr. Chetwynd, and flattered by the preference he has shown for me, yet there is a vehemence and impetuosity in his words and manner sometimes, even in ladies' society, which has inspired me with fear rather than any other feeling, and although fully sensible of his many good qualities, he is a person I really never could marry."

"Oh, he is a little hasty sometimes, my dear,—rather excitable I admit;—but

men of his sanguine temper are far preferable to those of a slow phlegmatic disposition."

"Pray, dear Papa, do not press me further, — for surely you would not wish me to marry one I could not love?"

"Well, well, my child, I shall say no more at present — but let me advise you to consider well to-night all I have stated in respect to the advantages of this connection; for such an offer may never be in your power to refuse again."

"I shall never change my opinion, dear Papa, in his favour, which I told him very decidedly at Lord Dunkerton's ball; and I am surprised he should have renewed his proposal to you, which it is very painful for me again to decline."

"Well, well, — think it over — think it over once more, Edith, and reserve your final decision until to-morrow; — we will dismiss the subject for this evening."

The absence of all irritability from the Colonel's address to his daughter will be accounted for by Mrs. Maxwell's advice

to her husband, not to press Mr. Chetwynd's proposal upon her.

"My dear Colonel," Mrs. Maxwell had remarked, "I have lately heard some strange reports about Mr. Chetwynd's religious principles, which, if true, are most objectionable, and would cause our dear child endless misery."

"Tut, tut, my dear! — old women's scandal — village gossip — to which I never attend. Chetwynd has, I dare say, as good moral and religious feelings as the generality of men. Very few of us, my dear, prove to be saints, when temptations come in our way, — but when married to a young wife, depend upon it he will be steady enough, and attend church regularly, like other husbands, for the sake of appearance, if from no better motive. You forget, too, he has been roaming amongst wild Indians for some years past, which has made him rather inattentive, perhaps, to these spiritual matters; but marriage will soon alter his habits and ideas in this respect — you women have

always some crotchet in your heads about a man's morality and religion."

"And it is very necessary we should, for, without the influence of our example in society, men would become perfect heathens."

Seeing himself likely to be on the wrong side of the argument, the Colonel forthwith retreated from the controversy, leaving his better half sole mistress of the room.

Just after the luncheon hour the following day, Mr. Chetwynd called again at Morton Grange, when Edith seeing him approaching the house, made her escape to her own room, whence, after hastily putting on her bonnet and shawl, she descended by the back staircase to the shrubbery behind the stables, through which there was a long meandering walk, leading to a sequestered plantation of rhododendrons and other evergreen shrubs, a small but deep piece of water occupying the centre, studded with a variety of reclaimed wildfowl.

This secluded spot was a favourite retreat of Edith's during the heat of summer, where, within a pretty grotto, around whose entrance roses and creeping plants hung suspended in graceful festoons, she sat reading or working; the birds, having become familiar with her voice, approaching the bank, and some, more bold than others, entering the grotto to be fed by her hand with crumbs of bread or grain. It was a bright though cold October day, and the breeze from the little lake sent a chilling sensation through her frame, which caused her to draw her shawl more closely around her; — but here Edith had resolved to remain until she could hear the sound of Mr. Chetwynd's horse, returning by the carriage drive which passed close at the back of the plantation.

In the mean time, Chetwynd had been in conference with the Colonel, who had explained to him his daughter's resolution to decline his proposal, notwithstanding the arguments he had used to alter her purpose.

"I have urged all I could think of in your favour, Chetwynd, but the young lady appears very determined, and I regret very much the failure of your suit."

"A thousand thanks, my dear Sir, for your kind advocacy of my cause; but with your permission, I should wish to make one last appeal to Miss Maxwell herself."

"To that I can offer no objection, although I am bound to tell you my belief, that your pleading will meet, I fear, with no better result; but Edith is gone out for a walk, and I cannot tell in what direction."

"With your leave, I will soon find her," Chetwynd said, and taking up his hat, he left the house in great agitation, and on meeting with the gardener, who had seen her, soon ascertained the path she had taken.

As Edith sat watching the movements of a pet moor-hen, picking up crumbs at the entrance of the grotto, the bird darted suddenly away with a shrill scream, and fled across the lake, when, hearing approaching footsteps, she sprang to her feet, but

ere she could reach the entrance, Mr. Chetwynd stood before her.

"I trust, Miss Maxwell," he said in the most deferential manner, "you will not consider me intrusive, but having heard that you had taken a walk in this direction, I could not resist the opportunity of once more pleading the cause ever uppermost in my thoughts, in the hope that your sentiments may have undergone some little change in my favour, since I first ventured to address you at Lord Dunkerton's ball."

"I must beg, Mr. Chetwynd, you will not renew that subject, since, as I then informed you, my feelings will never change."

"But why," he asked, "have you taken such a dislike to me?"

"I have taken no dislike to you, Mr. Chetwynd, but on the contrary, have felt most deeply your kind solicitude during my long illness, for which I shall ever be grateful, and shall always be glad, as I hitherto have been, to meet you as a friend;

but my conduct, I am convinced, has never given you the least cause to suppose I ever have, or could regard you in any other light."

"I had, indeed, indulged the pleasing hope," he continued — "do not call it delusion, — that you had begun to entertain more gentle feelings towards me, since my frequent visits to Morton Grange.

"This on your part must have been merely imaginary, since I do again assure you I have never intended to receive you otherwise than as a friend."

"Oh! speak not, dear Edith, in this cold repulsive manner;— but—perhaps—may I ask if you are engaged to Mr. Edmund Knightley, or any other person?"

"I must decline giving you any reply to such a question, which you have no right to ask; and I must beg you will now permit me to resume my walk alone."

"Stay, Miss Maxwell," he said, standing in her path, "I had some right to ask that question, since I have obtained your father's approval of my suit."

"Which will not induce me, Sir," she replied, with her father's spirit, "to alter my determination."

"Is it thus, then," he said, "you will consign me to hopeless despair — is it thus you would break a heart too fondly, too unalterably your own? — thus dash from my expectant lip the cup of happiness I had believed nearly filled to the brim? Oh! Edith, will you thus send me from your presence, again to become a wanderer on the face of the earth, without one word of consolation? Oh, no! — no!" he continued, with increasing vehemence, "it cannot—must not be,—I could not now exist without you — without you life would become a burden I could not bear, unless — that withering thought! — your hand and heart are pledged to another — answer me that question in the affirmative, and I must be content."

"I am not engaged to another, Mr. Chetwynd," she replied haughtily, "but never will be engaged to you."

"Then, by Heavens!" he exclaimed,

giving way to his violent, ungovernable temper, "mine you shall be in life or death — consent to become my wife, or beneath the waters of that lake both of us shall sleep in death!"

"Release me, Sir," Edith screamed, terrified by the fierce expression of his eyes, "I would rather die than become your wife!"

"Then die you shall, within these arms," he cried, "welcome death with you, rather than life without you!" And seizing her in his grasp, he dragged her to the brink of the water, the plantation resounding with her cries for help — his foot rested on the last spot of earth, from which he was about to take the fatal spring with her into the deep water below! —

CHAPTER XVII.

SUDDENLY a hand was laid upon his coat collar from behind, and he was thrown by a powerful jerk upon his back, Edith as he fell being released from his arms.

"Hah!" he exclaimed, springing again to his feet, "it is you, then, my hated rival, who have saved her life! but yours shall be the forfeit for this daring interruption — yours she shall never be —" and the next instant, Edmund Knightley found himself wrestling in a death struggle with this now infuriated madman, who, with almost supernatural power, was forcing him to the brink of the water!

For a moment Edith stood as if paralysed — every faculty of mind and body suspended — her bonnet torn off in her

struggle with Chetwynd, and her long, dark, dishevelled hair hanging in wild disorder over her neck and shoulders; she could scarcely realise the scene before her — all had passed so quickly, that it seemed like some horrid vision of the night. — Could she believe her senses? Was Edmund in reality there, the preserver of her life? — All this passed like lightning through her brain. She pressed her hand upon her brow as if to assure herself of being really awake; and at that moment a savage cry from Chetwynd roused her at once to life and action. She sprang forward to Edmund's assistance, who, as we have said, was being dragged to the very brink of the lake — another effort from Chetwynd had consigned them to destruction. With both hands Edith seized Edmund by his shooting-jacket pocket, with a resolution and strength of which she never could have believed herself capable — the whole energies of mind and body were concentrated in that one desperate effort. Giving way to this

sudden jerk they fell back together, Edmund rolling over Chetwynd, whom he now held firmly to the earth.

It was at this moment, when Edmund had got his opponent on the ground, although still unable to disengage his fearful hold, that Green the gardener, a young powerful man, with his assistant, alarmed by Edith's piercing shrieks, rushed down to the spot, just as Chetwynd had seized Edmund by the throat in the hope of strangling him.

"Save Mr. Edmund!" cried Edith frantically, "or he will be killed!" and in another moment, Chetwynd was pinioned by the gardener and his assistant, who knelt by his side, each holding an arm.

"Oh Edith! Edith! my own dear, courageous girl!" Edmund exclaimed, quickly advancing to take her hand;— but no word escaped her lips — her head sank on his shoulder — and she fell senseless in his arms. Alarmed by her death-like looks, Edmund carried her to the grotto, and laid her unresisting form upon a garden chair,

where, kneeling by her side, with the assistance of the little vinaigrette she had once given him, and which he always carried about him for her sake, she was gradually recovered.

"Oh, Edith," he said, as her eyes, slowly opening, rested for a second on his, and then closed again, "thank God you are restored to me once more, never I trust to part again!"

Edmund's words sounded like soft strains of music to her ear, although as yet she felt powerless to rise.

"Then you were not engaged to that madman Chetwynd?" Edmund continued.

"Oh no! no!" she exclaimed with sudden energy, roused by his now dreaded name; "I never did or could think of him otherwise than as a friend — and this he knew."

"Then you did not love him, Edith?" he asked.

"Oh no, I never did."

"Did you love another then, dearest Edith?" he asked in a low tender voice.

She turned her head away, blushing deeply, but made no reply.

"Oh, Edith!" he continued, "relieve me from this suspense; — did you — could you love him who is now kneeling at your feet? May I take this dear little hand, and keep it as my own?"

He took her trembling hand in his, which lay passive and unresisting in his grasp, and Edith, turning her face to him, burst into tears — tears of joy and inexpressible delight, that all her fondest hopes were at that moment realised.

Edmund caught her once more in his arms, and implanting one first hallowed kiss upon her lips, whispered, "My dear, sweet, loving girl, you are then indeed my own!"

By that moment of ecstatic bliss, Edith felt rewarded for days, weeks, and months of anxious solicitude and heart-rending despondency. Her restless nights, and long sufferings, were all repaid by the ineffable happiness, the tumultuous feelings she now experienced, when pressed to that

heart, to whose beating, throbbing pulsation her own now responded.

"Come, dearest," Edmund whispered, "you must now return home — this is no place for you."

"I will not go without you, Edmund," she said firmly, "and leave you here again at the mercy of that madman."

"Well, then," he said, "we must release him, and let him go." But at this moment Chetwynd had regained his feet, and gnashing his teeth with rage at his defeat, said — "We shall meet again, Edmund Knightley, where none will interrupt us." Then turning on his heel, he walked rapidly away, in a contrary direction to Morton Grange.

Colonel and Mrs. Maxwell were looking out of the drawing-room window — the former rather nervous about Chetwynd's meeting with Edith, when he exclaimed, on seeing two forms approaching the house, "Thank goodness, my dear, it is all settled — they are walking arm-in-arm together — a sure sign Chetwynd is accepted,

for Edith would never take his arm before this day."

"Chetwynd!" exclaimed Mrs. Maxwell, after a steady gaze upon her daughter and companion — "Gracious Heaven! it is Edmund Knightley upon whose arm my dear child is leaning."

"Nonsense, my dear," the Colonel said impatiently, "you are always dreaming of Edmund, who is thousands of miles away — this is only your silly fancy. It is Chetwynd you see approaching."

"Oh, Edmund! Edmund! — my dear affectionate boy!" she cried, rushing out of the room.

"Crazy," muttered the Colonel, "my wife is quite crazy — monomania, Sir — decided monomania — she has taken it into her head that Edith must marry Edmund, and not all the world will persuade her to the contrary, until she is actually Chetwynd's wife. When women once get a crotchet into their heads nothing will get it out again. — But, eh! what do I see? Mrs. Maxwell is absolutely hugging him

round the neck — she dare not treat Chetwynd so. — No, by Jove! Sir, it must be Edmund Knightley!"

Whilst the Colonel was thus soliloquising, Mrs. Maxwell had indeed thrown her arms round Edmund, in her excessive joy at his return; but when released from his embrace, the first question, ever uppermost in her thoughts, was addressed to him.

"We heard you were married, Edmund, or engaged."

"I am not married yet, my dear, kind friend," Edmund replied, "but believe, I may say, I am engaged."

Mrs. Maxwell turned an anxious look on Edith, fearing the effect this announcement might produce; — but what did she behold? — Edith's eyes cast on the ground, and her now joy-lit, smiling face suffused with blushes.

"Oh, Edmund! is it — can it be that you mean Edith?"

"Yes, my dear, kind, second mother," Edmund said, "dear Edith has promised me

this precious hand, if you will confirm her choice."

"May Heaven, who has heard my prayers," Mrs. Maxwell replied in the most fervent manner, joining their hands together, "bless and preserve you both, my own dear children, it is enough—my happiness is now complete, even to overflowing."

"Well, well, my dear," exclaimed the Colonel now coming up, "I should think Edmund had enough of hugging and kissing by his time—but what on earth is the matter with you all? You crying—Edith blushing and smiling—Edmund looking quite wild with excitement,—why, it seems to me you are all crazy together;—but where is Chetwynd?"

"That, my dear Colonel, I will explain to you when we reach the house," Edmund said, now very gravely. On which Edith, with Mrs. Maxwell, made her escape to her own room, where we will leave mother and daughter to the full enjoyment of this unmixed cup of happiness.

The consternation and horror of Colonel

Maxwell, when informed by Edmund of his son-in-law elect's attempt upon the life of Edith, would be difficult of depiction.

"What, Sir!" he exclaimed, springing from his chair and confronting Edmund, "Do you mean to tell me that Chetwynd attempted to murder my daughter — his intended wife, Sir, — whom he obtained my consent to marry — and for whom he has shown the most devoted, the most undeniable and unequivocal affection? The thing is impossible, Sir — I beg your pardon, quite impossible!"

"I beg *your* pardon, my dear Sir," Edmund replied very gravely; "but for God's providential mercy in sending me to her rescue, your dear Edith had now been numbered among the dead. I arrived just in time; Chetwynd had her in his arms — his last footstep was on the very brink of the lake — his last words ringing in my ears, "Welcome death with you rather than life without you" — when I seized him, and by a violent effort hurled him back

upon the ground, releasing Edith from his grasp. Maddened by my interference he then strove by might and main, to drag me into the water, and the strength of this madman was so great, that, save for dear Edith clinging to my arm, I had been his victim. Your gardener, Green, and his assistant, were witnesses to this scene, — ask them, Sir, if you doubt my word — let me call them."

"No, no, Edmund, I do not doubt your word; but what could induce Chetwynd to act in this outrageous manner. Good heavens! Sir, he must have been crazy."

"No doubt of that, my dear Colonel; for a friend of his I met at the Lucca Baths, and who had been his fellow-traveller through Egypt and Syria, when he was attacked by a brain fever, told me that ever since he had been subject to great excitement at certain periods, during which he became almost unmanageable, and his friend's expression was, 'that he would end his days in a lunatic asylum.' Upon

this information, and there having heard for the first time of poor Edith's engagement to him, I immediately set off on my journey home, to save her from such a dreadful union."

"Horrible, Edmund! quite horrible to think of!" the Colonel exclaimed, pacing the room in great agitation — "Good heavens! what should I have done?—consigned my dear gentle child to the arms of a maniac! Thank God, Sir — I do thank God, from the bottom of my heart," — and the tears stood in the father's eyes — "that he has saved me from being, perhaps, the destroyer of my own dear affectionate child. God has been merciful to me — very merciful — more merciful than I deserve, my dear Edmund — I feel it here, Edmund, at my heart — I cannot express all I would say; — and you, my dear boy, what reward — what return can I ever make you for your noble, fearless conduct in saving poor Edith from a watery grave?"

"There is one boon, one reward I covet,

my dear Colonel, far, far above all my deserts — on which the future happiness of my life now depends — the hand of that dear, affectionate child."

"What, Edmund, what! you in love with Edith? Then why, in the name of all that is marvellous, did you not tell me this before? Could you doubt our regard for you? Mrs. Maxwell's love — yes, Edmund, almost maternal love for her dear Edmund, as she calls you?"

"Oh no, my dear Sir, I could not doubt your kind regard for me, and Mrs. Maxwell's love, but I never knew the extent of mine for Edith — how deep and true it was — until I had left England, and was separated from her beloved society."

"Well, well, Edmund — all's well that ends well — God be praised for his twofold mercies bestowed upon me this day! But here, my dear boy, comes Edith with her mother — my heart is too full now for words — I must go to my room — tears do not become a man — give me your hand," — and placing his daughter's in

Edmund's, he said in a choking voice — "God bless you my dear children," and hurried from the room.

Two hours afterwards, when Edmund and Edith had returned to the house from their first lover's walk together, and the Colonel had recovered his usual composure and dignity of manner, Edmund said cheerfully, "Well, my dear Sir, if you will excuse my sitting down to table in a shooting-jacket, I will dine with you this evening."

"Well, well, Edmund, rather against rules you know, but if you proposed dining in your shirt sleeves to-day I could not refuse you; but I think my wardrobe will supply the garment you require," at which proposal both Mrs. Maxwell and Edith could not suppress a laugh.

"Then lend me John and the dog-cart, instead," Edmund said, "and I will send over for my things, and write a line to my father, telling him I do not dine at home."

"You shall have John and the dog-cart with the greatest pleasure," the Colonel

replied, "so sit down and write your note whilst I tell him to get ready."

Whilst Edmund was thus employed, Mrs. Maxwell whispered Edith, who approaching him said, "Mamma desires me to tell you she will not allow you to return home to-night."

"Are these your commands also, dearest?" Edmund asked, looking up into her face with his usual winning smile.

"Dear Edmund, how can you ask me such a question, after our long separation?"

"Well, my dear girl, tell your Mamma, then, I will obey her orders on one condition, that she will bear with my company to-morrow also — I will ride over in the morning and tell my father and the Earl of my present happy prospects, and dine with you again to-morrow night; — will this please you, my own dear, precious Edith?"

"Yes," she whispered, "you know it will make me so happy — so now finish your note, dear Edmund, and I will bring you the sealing-wax."

"About nine o'clock that same evening, a letter was received by the Colonel from Mr. Chetwynd, expressing the deepest sorrow and horror for his frenzied behaviour to his daughter, whose pardon he most earnestly implored, and concluded by saying he intended to leave home the following day, in the vain hope that change of scene might in some degree mitigate the poignancy of his grievous disappointment. "And now, my dear Sir," he added, "accept my best and grateful thanks for all your past kindness, and the many happy hours spent by me under your hospitable roof; and should I never again return to my native land, your too dearly loved daughter will receive a proof of my long-felt deep regard and esteem for her."

"Poor fellow! poor fellow!" exclaimed the Colonel, as, handing the letter to his wife, he brushed away a tear from his eye, "he has a good heart, and I must write one line to him, to assure him of our forgiveness."

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was on the following morning, when the excitement of the previous day had subsided, that Edmund and Edith were again strolling together though the pleasure grounds of Morton Grange. They were standing near the little wicket gate, and Edmund said — "This spot, my own beloved girl, witnessed our last sad parting, and now, through God's mercy, it is the scene of our happy reunion. I parted from you in the deepest sorrow, I am united to you again in heart and soul now, with a joy that passes all description. When you left me here, I had almost resolved to change my purpose and not quit England; for, on witnessing your grief, the thought first struck me that you regarded me with deeper feelings than

those of mere friendship; but other thoughts succeeded to dispel from my mind this pleasing delusion; for then I believed it so, as I fancied you loved my brother more than me — still, however, through all my travels, the recollection of our last parting has been ever present to my mind; but when my brother wrote to me in his usual sarcastic style, — "The report is current here, and confirmed by his constant attendance at Morton Grange, that your dear friend Edith, for whom you expressed such Platonic affection, is engaged to be married to Chetwynd," — the letter fell from my hands, and so great was my agitation, that Egerton feared some fatal news had reached me from home. Fatal indeed it was to my peace and prospects of happiness, — but I remembered that you had once refused Chetwynd — still the thought harassed me day and night, that possibly you had yielded to your father's wishes, and might become the unwilling bride of one you did not love. I wrote to my dear sister Emmeline, begging her to ascertain the

truth of this report; and her reply reached me at the Lucca Baths, after having been detained some time at Florence — and oh! how cheering were her words.

"It is true, my own dear brother, that Mr. Chetwynd is a constant visitor at Morton Grange, and I believe has the Colonel's approval of his addresses to my sweet, affectionate friend, Edith, but after your last letter, I can no longer withhold another truth from you, which Edith betrayed to me by her excessive agitation, when speaking of your reported engagement to Lucy Egerton — that she loves you, my own dear Edmund, and you only. — In writing this, I am not betraying the secret of my friend, for, with her usual reserve, she has never confided such a secret to my keeping; but I know the looks of love, and the agitation she vainly attempted to suppress, convinced me beyond all doubt of the nature of her feelings towards you: come home then, dearest Edmund, without delay, save this gentle, loving girl from misery, and give a

sister to your fond and attached Emmeline."

"I never knew until now, dear Edmund, that your sister suspected the true cause of my illness, but I will not deny to yourself, after your candid confession to me, the agony of mind I sustained when first told of your engagement to Lucy Egerton. It was then, dear Edmund, that I felt it impossible for me to love another."

"And now, my own precious girl," Edmund said, clasping her in his arms, "our mutual confessions made, you must love me with heart and soul, as I shall you, and trust me in everything as your nearest, dearest friend, we must have no thoughts, cares, joy or sorrow, separate from each other."

"Ah!" exclaimed a soft, sweet voice, "I am sorry to interrupt this very charming scene, but I must have some kisses too, from my new dear sister," and the next moment Edith and Emmeline Knightley were locked in a warm embrace.

"There, Edmund," his sister said play-

fully, "now you may go — your society, although very agreeable sometimes, can be dispensed with for the next hour, during which, I shall have Edith entirely to myself — so go, and pacify your Papa and Mamma, who have come over here in very great anger, at your presumption in daring to bespeak a wife without first consulting their wishes; — go, you naughty boy, directly, and beg their pardon for this very serious offence, and tell them from me, when I have lectured Edith sufficiently for encouraging you in such undutiful conduct, I shall hand her over to receive that punishment from them she so richly deserves."

We will not relate the conversation of these two sweet girls, when linked now, in heart and feeling, by the prospect of that nearer tie which was soon to unite them in a closer friendship — as they walked arm-in-arm together, talking of past sorrows and suffering, and now partaking of mutual and unmixed joy; nor need we say with what delight the kind-hearted

Squire and Mrs. Knightley received their son's blushing and beautiful bride elect, who had always been Mrs. Knightley's especial favourite, although her husband had once indulged the hope of seeing him married to Lady Agnes.

"Well, Papa," Emmeline said, "as you have punished this poor child so as to make her shed many very bitter tears, I shall take her away from you to her own room, and I am sorry to say I must remain here this night to comfort her, for your cruel treatment."

"Then, Emmy," replied her father, "you must ask Mrs. Maxwell to send you home in her carriage, as your mother has to make some calls to-morrow."

"I am afraid, my dear Sir," Mrs. Maxwell said, "that I shall be doing the same thing — and I am not quite sure," she added laughing, "that I shall be able to spare my carriage this week, which is very provoking."

"Well, well, my dear," interposed the Colonel, "Knightley has promised to dine

here on Monday — so Emmeline must remain until that night."

"Then this point being determined as to my disposal, without my consent being asked," Emmeline said, "I shall now run away with Edith," and after throwing her arms round her father and mother's neck, the merry-hearted girl, taking Edith's hand, tripped lightly with her from the room, singing as they ascended the staircase together, —

> "Oh! dear, what can the matter be?
> Oh! dear, what shall I do?
> There's nobody coming to marry me,
> Nobody coming to woo."

"That's my case, Edith dear, yours is the reverse; you will have lots of wooing, billing, and cooing from that sentimental brother of mine, be bored to death with him, my love, before a month has passed."

Edmund was sitting alone in the drawing-room, before dinner, occupying an arm-chair, with his back to the door, when

Emmeline, entering noiselessly with Edith, and cautiously approaching him without disturbing his reverie, whispered, "A penny I tell your thoughts."

"Oh! Emmy, you silly girl," he exclaimed, jumping up, "how you startled me!"

"From a beautiful dream, no doubt," she added, "to behold a more beautiful reality;—now confess you never saw your lovely Edith looking so lovely before. I have enacted the part of lady's maid to-night, and arranged her hair according to my fancy."

"Well, let me see," Edmund said, taking her hand to draw her nearer.

"No, Teddy, that you shall not do," guessing his purpose; "you shall not spoil my handiwork by displacing one of those ringlets."

"Then I will displace yours instead, you meddling girl," and catching her in his arms, he imprinted several kisses on both her cheeks.

"Edmund, you rude boy," she cried,

"let me go directly, Sir; I must now return to my room to re-adjust my tresses."

"And as it would be only one trouble, my dear," Edmund said, gently drawing Edith to his side, "you can see if Edith's require amendment also."

"If you dare to treat either of us so again, I will advise Edith to change her mind, Master Edmund, and give you up. There's that pink of *politesse*, Mr. Welford, so deferential, so respectful to ladies, that he would scarcely dare to raise the tips of his lady-love's fingers to his lips, ready to throw himself at Edith's feet upon the slightest encouragement. For the last three months he has been trying to ascertain from me whether she was positively engaged to Mr. Chetwynd or not; and I have also received two long letters from my friend, Lady Ann Eversfield, telling me that her brother can think and talk of no one else than dear Edith, since he danced with her at Dunkerton House, and not having met her, as he hoped in town last season, he is coming down for a month's

hunting with the Marquis, with the intention of improving his acquaintance with my exceedingly lovely friend Miss Maxwell. So you see, Master Edmund, she has two new silver or golden strings to her bow, and I recommend *you* to be on your good behaviour, or I shall recommend *her* to become the Marchioness of Eynsford, instead of Mrs. Edmund Knightley;—but here comes the Colonel, who will keep you in order if I cannot."

Emmeline was in exuberant spirits that evening, having at last seen the accomplishment of her long-cherished hopes, and after dinner she began to attack the Colonel about giving a ball and supper upon the joyful occasion.

"Pooh! pooh! my dear," the Colonel said, "you girls are always thinking of balls and such things, but I really cannot have my house turned topsy-turvy to suit your fancies. You may have a dance upon the carpet, my dear, if you are so fond of hopping about."

"My dear Colonel, I hope you will not

think me impertinent, but I am sure it would do your carpets good to take them up and give them a good beating."

"Not unlikely, my dear, but that can easily be done without giving a ball; if I must give one, however, the proper time would be on Edith's marriage."

"Oh, my gracious, Colonel, that will never do, dear Edith would not then enjoy the fun with us—nothing like the time present—we are all so happy now, just in the mood for dancing and singing, and according to the old song, 'There's a time to be merry and gay,' besides, my dear Colonel, people did make the remark last season, that Colonel Maxwell was the only person who had not opened his house and heart like his neighbours, from the first day of hunting until its close."

"Well, well, Emmeline," the Colonel said, rather testily, "we will think about it, my dear, plenty of time yet."

The happiness of Edmund and Edith was now as complete as it was possible for that of any two human beings to be

in this world. Their love for each other was founded on that only sure foundation of long and lasting affection — esteem. From being friends they had become lovers — but there was wanting that wild, passionate rhapsody of feeling, which fills the mind of youth with distempered and chaotic imaginings. Theirs was a pure, calm, unruffled affection, unaccompanied by foolish excited fancies, or rapturous expressions. Edith was not an angel exactly in Edmund's eyes, although closely approaching human perfection, but a dear, fond, affectionate girl, whom he loved more for her many excellent qualities of mind and disposition than her exceeding beauty of person.

He had loved Lady Agnes with the first impulsive passion of youth, for her beauty and charms of person only; but even at that time, when unwilling to believe in her imperfections of character, the contrast between her and Edith could not be concealed from his partial sight. Even then he would trust and consult Edith as his friend — her ideas and feeling were more

attuned to his own than those of Lady Agnes. What were his thoughts now? Those of thankfulness that his first wild love had failed, and that he could now reward this sweet, confiding girl, for her long sorely-tried affection for himself, with his heart and hand. "Yes," he murmured, "my hand at least should have been hers, for her deep devotion to myself, but now I feel my heart is hers also."

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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